GAMBRINUS

and other Stories

by

ALEXANDRE KUPRIN

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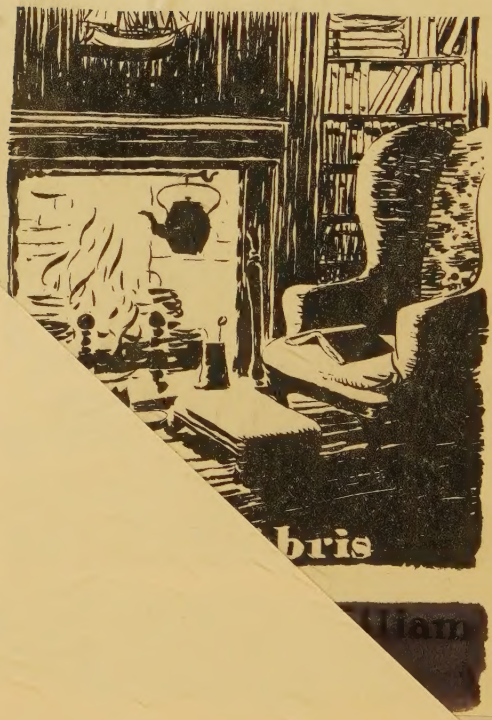

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and Other Stories

ALEXANDRE KUPRIN

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and Other Stories

Translated from the Russian of
ALEXANDRE KUPRIN

by
Bernard Guilbert Guerney

". . . Art will endure all things,
and will all things conquer . . ."

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I DEDICATE THE
LABOURS INVOLVED IN THIS VOLUME
TO
MY FATHER
IN LOVE AND ADMIRATION

B. G. G.

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GAMBRINUS

GAMBRINUS

I

SUCH was the name of a certain beer-shop in a bustling seaport town in the south of Russia. Even though it was situated on one of the most populous streets it was hard to find, thanks to its subterranean location. Often a frequenter,—even one well known and well received at the Gambrinus, would contrive to pass by this remarkable establishment, turning back only after having passed two or three neighboring stores.

Sign there was none. People entered the narrow, ever open door directly from the sidewalk. Just as narrow a staircase of twenty stone steps, trodden down and made crooked by many millions of heavy boots, led downward from it. Upon the partition, where the stairs ended, was a bedaubed image,

in *alto relievo,* of King Gambrinus,—the splendid guardian spirit of beer brewing,—in all his glory, and approximately twice human height. Probably this sculptured creation was the first work of a beginning amateur, and appeared to be crudely executed in petrified chunks of porous sponge; however, the red jacket, the ermine mantle, the gold crown, and the mug, raised high and with the white froth trickling down, all left no doubt that before the visitor was the great patron of beer brewing himself.

The beer-shop consisted of two vaulted halls, long but exceedingly narrow. The underground moisture always oozed out of the walls in trickling rivulets, and glistened in the light of the gas-jets, which burned day and night, since the beer-shop was entirely lacking in windows. On the vaults, however, one could still make out with sufficient distinctness traces of diverting mural painting. In one picture a large company of German laddies, in green jackets and hats with wood-cock feathers, was holding carouse, their guns slung over their shoulders. All of

them, with their faces turned toward the hall, welcomed the public with extended mugs; while two of them, at the same time, were also embracing the waists of two buxom damsels, —servants of the village inn, or, perhaps, daughters of some worthy farmer. Upon another wall was depicted a picnic of the *beau monde,* period of the first half of the eighteenth century: countesses and viscounts in powdered wigs demurely frollicking upon a green meadow with lambs; and, right alongside, under spreading willows, a pond, with swans being gracefully fed by ladies and cavaliers seated in some sort of a gilt nutshell. The next picture represented the interior of a moujik's hut, and a family of happy Little Russians, dancing the thumping *gopak,* with demijohns in their hands. Still farther on a large keg flaunted itself, and upon it, entwined with grapes and leaves of hops, two cupids,—fat unto ugliness, with greasy lips, and shamelessly lubricous eyes, —were clinking shallow goblets. In the second hall, separated from the first by a semicircular arch, ran a series of pictures from

frog life: frogs drinking beer in a green marsh; frogs hunting grasshoppers among thickly-growing reeds; frogs playing in a stringed quartette; frogs engaged in sword play, and so forth. Evidently, the walls had been decorated by a foreign master.

Instead of tables, heavy kegs of oak were placed about the floor, which had sawdust thickly strewn upon it; instead of chairs there were small kegs. To the right of the entrance was raised a small platform, with a piano standing upon it. It was now many years without a break that Sashka the musician,—a Jew, and a meek, droll, tipsy, bald-headed fellow, with the appearance of a moth-eaten ape of indeterminate years,—had played here every evening upon his fiddle for the delectation and diversion of the guests. The years passed by; the waiters with their leather sleeve-protectors changed; the brewers, and the drivers of the beer-trucks, changed; the very proprietors of the beer-shop changed; but Sashka, every evening toward six, was invariably seated upon his platform, fiddle in hand, and a little white dog on his knees;

while at one o'clock at night he would walk out of Gambrinus, in the company of the same little dog Bielochka,[1] scarcely able to keep his feet from the beer he had drunk.

However, there was another immutable personage in the Gambrinus,—Madame Ivanova, the dispenser; a full, anæmic old woman, who, from being ceaselessly in the damp, underground place dedicated to beer, bore a resemblance to the pallid, indolent fishes inhabiting the depths of sea-grottoes. She silently directed the help from her bar counter, like the captain of a ship upon his bridge, and smoked all the time, holding the cigarette in the right corner of her mouth, her right eye puckering from the smoke. Only rarely did anyone succeed in hearing her voice, and she responded to all bows by a colourless smile that was always the same.

[1] The nearest equivalent to this, and other forms of this name, is Whiti.—*Trans.*

II

THE huge port,—one of the world's largest ports of commerce,—was always thronged to overflowing with ships. Gigantic, dark-rusty armored cruisers entered it. Yellow, thick-funnelled steamers of the Volunteer Fleet, that daily swallowed long trains of merchandise or thousands of convicts, loaded here on their way to the Far East. Spring and autumn, hundreds of flags from all the ends of the terrestrial globe waved here; and from morn to night came the sounds of commands and curses in all possible tongues. From the ships to the countless warehouses, and back again over the shaky gangways, scurried the stevedores: Russian hoboes, ragged, nearly naked, with drunken, puffy faces; swarthy Turks in dirty turbans, and in baggy trousers, wide to the knee but wound tightly about the leg; stocky, muscular Persians, with hair and nails tinged a fiery carrot color by henna. Often two- and three-masted

Italian schooners, splendid from afar, would come into the port, with their sails in orderly tiers,—clean, white, and resilient, like the breasts of young women; coming into ken from beyond the lighthouse these graceful ships seemed,—especially on radiant spring mornings,—wonderful white visions, sailing, not upon the water, but in the air, above the horizon. Here, for months at a time, in the dirty-green water of the port, in the midst of flotsam, egg-shells, water-melon rinds, and flocks of white sea gulls, swayed the high-pooped Anatolian barks and the *feluccas* of Trebizond, with their strange coloring, carving, and bizarre ornaments. Occasionally, even certain queer, narrow crafts, under black, tarred sails, with a dirty rag instead of a flag, would sail into the port; having turned the jetty-head,—and well nigh scraping it with the bulwark,—such a ship, careening all to one side and without abating its speed, would fly into any harbor it chose, heaving to, amid polyglot billingsgate, curses and threats, at the first mole that it came to, whereupon its hands,—little men of bronze,

entirely naked,—letting out a guttural cackling and with a speed that passed all understanding, would stow away the torn sails, and instantly the dirty, mysterious ship would become bereft of life. And just as mysteriously, some dark night, without showing its lights, it would silently vanish out of the port. The whole bay swarmed of nights with the light shells of the smugglers. Fishermen from far and near brought their fish into the city: in the spring, the small *Kamsa,* that, in its millions, filled their barks to the gunwales; in the summer, the misshapen flounder; in the autumn, mackerel, fat sea-bass, and oysters; and in the winter, ten- and twenty-*poud* [1] white sturgeon, caught, frequently at a great risk to life, many miles out from shore.

All these people,—sailors of different nationalities, fishermen, stokers, rollicking cabin-boys, thieving water-rats, machinists, laborers, boatmen, stevedores, divers,—all of them were young, healthy, and saturated with the pungent odor of the sea and of fish; they

[1] A *poud* is equal to about thirty pounds, avoirdupois. —*Trans.*

knew the arduousness of toil, loved the allure and horror of daily risk, and, above all things, valued strength, the audacity and tang of virile words, and the cleverness that comes of courage; but ashore they gave themselves up with a savage enjoyment to broad debauchery, drinking, and brawls. Of evenings, the lights of the great city, running upward to the heights, would lure them on, like eyes of magic radiance; always holding out promises of some new, joyous thing, never yet experienced,—and always deceiving.

The town was joined to the port by narrow, steep, many-angled streets,—decent folk shunned walking through them at night. At every step one came upon lodging houses, with dirty, closely-barred windows, with the gloomy light of a solitary lamp within. Still oftener met with were shops, where one might sell all the clothing on one's back, down to the sailor's jersey next the skin,—and then dress in any seafaring togs one might choose. Here also were many beer-halls, taverns, cook-shops and inns, with eloquent signs in all languages, and not a few brothels, both wide

open and clandestine ones, from the thresholds of which, of nights, crudely bedaubed women with their hoarse voices invited the sailors in. There were Greek coffee-houses, where games of dominoes and "sixty-six" went on; and Turkish coffee-houses, with sets for smoking the *narghili,* where a night's lodging cost a five-*kopeck* copper; there were little oriental taverns, in which were sold snails, *petalidis,* crayfish, mussels, great, warty, ink-squirting squids, and other sea abominations. Somewhere in the garrets and basements, behind close shutters, snuggled gambling dens, in which stoss and baccarat would often wind up in a slit belly or a split skull; and right around the corner, in some little cubby-hole alongside, it was possible to dispose of any stolen thing one liked, from a diamond bracelet to a cross of silver, and from a bale of Lyons velvet to a regulation naval uniform overcoat.

These steep, narrow streets, black from coal dust, towards night always became viscid and malodorous, as though they were in a nightmare sweat. And they resembled sewers, or

filthy intestines, through which this city of many nations cast forth into the sea all its refuge, all its decay, all its abomination and vice, infecting with them strong muscular bodies and simple souls.

The roistering inhabitants of this region seldom ascended to the dandified city, with its perpetual holiday mood, with its plate-glass, its proud monuments, its glow of electricity, —its majestic policemen, asphalt sidewalks, avenues bordered on both sides with white acacias; with all its deliberate display of cleanliness and well-being. But every one of them, before casting to the winds his hard-earned, greasy, torn, bloated rouble notes, was sure to visit the Gambrinus. This was sanctified by ancient custom, even though it necessitated picking one's way, under the cover of darkness, to the very center of the city.

Many, it is true, were altogether ignorant of the high-faluting name of the glorious King of Beer. Some one would simply propose:

"Let's go to Sashka?"

And the others would answer:

"It's a go! Steer that way!"

And then a unanimous "Heave ho!" would follow.

It was little to be wondered at, that among the folk of the port and the sea Sashka enjoyed greater reverence and celebrity than, say, the local archbishop or governor. And, if not his name, then, beyond a doubt, his apelike face and his fiddle were at times recalled in Sydney and Plymouth, as well as in New York, in Constantinople, and on the Island of Ceylon, to say nothing of the sounds and bays of the Black Sea, where a multitude of admirers of his talent was to be found among the numbers of the doughty fisher folk.

III

USUALLY, Sashka arrived at the Gambrinus at a time when it was practically deserted, save for a chance visitor or two. A thick and sour smell of yesterday's beer pervaded the rooms at such a time, and the place was rather dark, because gas was economized during the day. On the sultry days of July, when the stone city languished from the heat and was deafened by the din of the streets, the quiet and coolness of the place were grateful to the senses.

Sashka would walk up to the bar, exchange greetings with Madame Ivanova, and drink his first mug of beer. Sometimes she would ask him:

"Won't you play something, Sashka?"

"What would you have me play, Madame Ivanova?" Sashka, who was especially polite to her, would courteously inquire.

"Something of your own . . ."

Seating himself at his usual place to the left of the piano, he would play some strange, long drawn out, saddening pieces. The underground place somehow grew somnolent and still,—with only the dull rumbling of the city floating in from the street, and the occasional cautious clatter of china by waiters in the kitchen, behind the partition. Hebraic sorrow, ancient as earth itself, all interwoven and entwined by the mournful flowers of national melodies, wept upon the strings of Sashka's fiddle. Sashka's face, with tensed chin and forehead sunk low, with eyes that gazed austerely from under the heavy eyebrows, did not at this twilight hour at all resemble that grinning, winking, dancing face of Sashka which was familiar to all the guests of Gambrinus. His little dog Bielochka sat upon his knees. She had long since grown accustomed not to whine in accompaniment to the music, but the passionately melancholic, sobbing and maledictory strains involuntarily irritated her: she would open her mouth wide in convulsive yawns, her little thin pink tongue curling back, and her entire tiny body and

diminutive, tender, black-eyed phiz quivering for a moment.

But now, little by little, the public gathered; the accompanist,—who had finished his by-occupation for the day with some tailor or watch maker,—arrived; sausages in hot water and cheese sandwiches were put out on the counter; and, finally, all the remaining gas jets were lit. Sashka, draining his second mug, would issue a command to his partner: "*The May Parade,—ein, zwei, drei!*" and would begin a tempestuous march. From this moment on he barely managed to bow to the new arrivals, of which each one deemed himself an especially intimate friend of Sashka's, and, after his bow, would survey the other guests proudly. At the same time, Sashka was puckering up now one eye, now the other; the long creases upon his bald, back-sloping skull gathered themselves upward; he moved his lips comically, and smiled in all directions.

Toward ten or eleven Gambrinus, which could hold up to two hundred people and more in its rooms, was packed to overflow-

ing. Many,—almost half,—came with women who wore kerchiefs upon their heads; none took offence at the crowding, a foot stepped upon, a hat crumpled, or somebody else's beer poured over one's trousers; if any grew offended, it was only on account of being in one's cups, to "show off." The dampness of the basement, dully glistening, streamed still more copiously from the walls with their covering of oil colors, while the exhalations of the crowds dripped down from the ceiling, like a fine, heavy, warm rain. Drinking was taken seriously in the Gambrinus. Among the manners of this establishment it was deemed especially clever, while sitting in twos and threes, to cover the table with bottles in such a manner that one's *vis à vis* could not be seen behind a green forest of glass.

At the height of the evening the guests became flushed, hoarse, and all damp. The tobacco smoke made the eyes smart. It was necessary to shout and to lean over the table to hear one another in the general hubbub. And only the indefatigable fiddle of Sashka,

sitting on his elevation, triumphed over the stifling atmosphere, over the heat, over the reek of tobacco, gas, and beer, and over the yelling of the unceremonious public.

But the visitors quickly grew tipsy from the beer, from the proximity of the women, from the warm air. Every one wanted his own loved, familiar songs. Two or three men, dim of eye and uncertain of movements, always hovered near Sashka, plucking him by the sleeve and interfering with his playing.

"Sashh! . . . The one that makes you suffer . . . 'Bli . . ."—the supplicant would hiccough,—" 'Blige me!"

"Right away, right away," Sashka kept on repeating, nodding his head rapidly, and, without a sound, with the dexterity of a surgeon, slipping a silver coin into his side pocket. "Right away, right away."

"Sashka, that's a low-down trick now. I've given you the money, and it's now for the twentieth time that I'm asking you for *I Was Sailing By Sea To Odessa.*"

"Right away, right away. . . ."

"Sashka,—*Marussiya!*"

"Sashka,—*The Nightingale!*"

"*Setz-Setz,* Sashka,—*Setz-Setz!*"

"Right away, right away. . . ."

"*The Chaban!*" a voice, more like a colt's than a human being's, would yell from the other end of the hall.

And, amidst general laughter, Sashka would crow back at him like a rooster:

"Right-a-way. . . ."

And he played without rest all the songs ordered. Apparently, there was not a single one that he did not know by heart. Silver coins poured into his pockets from all sides, and mugs of beer were sent to him from all the tables. When he would climb off his platform to go to the bar, he would be rent into pieces:

"Sashenka . . . Da'ling . . . One tiny mug . . ."

"Sashka, here's to your health. Come here when you're told, you devil,—durn your heart an' liver!"

"Sashka-a, come here and drink some bee-eer!" yelled the colt's voice.

The women, inclined, like all women,

towards going into raptures over those who tread the boards, and to playing the coquette, to distinguishing themselves before them, and to slavish prostration, called him with cooing voice, with playful, capricious giggling:

"Sashechka, you just gotta have a drink on me. . . . No, no, no,— I'm asking you. And after that, play the cake-walk."

Sashka grinned, bowing left and right and grimacing; he pressed his hands to his heart, threw kisses in the air, drank beer at all the tables, and, having returned to the piano, where a fresh mug was awaiting him, would begin to play some song or other,—a *Parting*, say. Sometimes, to amuse his auditors, he made his fiddle whine like a puppy, or grunt like a pig, or snore in rending bass sounds, all in time with the tune. And the auditors welcomed these antics with benevolent approval:

"Ho-ho-ho-ho-o-o!"

It grew hotter and hotter; the moisture poured down from the ceiling. Some of the guests were already weeping, smiting their breasts; others, with blood-shot eyes, were

quarreling over women and over old scores, and trying to get at each other, held back by their more sober neighbors,—parasites, most frequently. The waiters squeezed through by a miracle between the kegs and casks, small and large, among the legs and the torsos, holding their hands, ringed with beer mugs, high above the heads of the sitters. Madame Ivanova, more anæmic, imperturbable and taciturn than ever, directed the activities of the servants from behind the bar-counter, like the captain of a ship during a storm.

All were overcome with the desire to sing. Sashka, all limp from the beer, his own labors, and that crude joy which his music afforded to others, was ready to play any piece that might be desired. And the hoarse people, with discordant, wooden voices, bawled in unison to the sounds of his fiddle, staring one another in the eyes with ludicrous gravity:

For why should we be pa-arted,
Ah, why should we live a-part;
Ain't it better to be united,
An' treasure love at heart?

While another group alongside, trying to drown out the first (evidently an unfriendly one) with its yelling, was vociferating, by now entirely out of tune:

> Oh, his pants is kinda gay,
> An' his chestnut hair is sleek;
> You can tell just by his walk
> That his boots is built to creak.

The Gambrinus was often visited by "Dongolakis,"—Greeks from Asia Minor, who put into Russian ports to trade their fish. They, too, ordered from Sashka their oriental songs, consisting of a dismal, snuffling, monotonous wail of two or three notes; and with gloomy faces, with flaming eyes, they were ready to sing these songs whole hours through. And Sashka also played Italian popular couplets, and Ukrainian snatches, and Yiddish wedding dances, and much else besides. Once a knot of negro sailors dropped into the Gambrinus, in whom, upon beholding the others, a similar desire arose to sing a bit. Sashka rapidly caught by ear the galloping melody, picked out, on the spot, an accompaniment to it on

the piano, and lo! to the great delight and amusement of the *habitués* of Gambrinus, the beer-hall resounded to the strange, capricious, guttural sounds of the African song.

A certain reporter on a local paper, a friend of Sashka's, somehow talked a professor in a school of music into going to the Gambrinus to hear the locally celebrated violinist. But Sashka surmised this, and purposely made his violin mew, bleat, and roar more than ever. The guests at Gambrinus were simply splitting their sides with laughing, but the professor uttered contemptuously:

"Buffoonery!"

And went off, without finishing his mug.

IV

NOT infrequently the exquisite marquises and the feasting German jagers, the fat cupids and the frogs, were, from their walls, witnesses of such broad revelry as was rarely to be seen anywhere save at the Gambrinus.

A party of thieves out on a spree, for instance, would arrive after a good "job"; each with his beloved, each in a cap at a rakish slant; in patent leather boots, with choice tavern manners, with a disdainful air. Sashka played special songs for them,—the thieves' own: *I'm a Ruined Laddie,*[1] *Don't You Cry, Marussiya,*[2] *Spring Is Gone,* and others.

[1] One stanza of this classic is given in the same author's epical *Yama:*

I'm a ruined laddie,
Ruined for alway;
While year after year
The days go away. *Trans.*

[2] A stanza of this, also, is given in *Yama,* among many other picaresque songs:

Don't you cry, my Mary,
You'll belong to me;
When I've served the army
I will marry thee. *Trans.*

Dancing they considered beneath their dignity; but their lady friends, all of them not at all bad to look upon, rather young,—some of them almost girls,—danced the *Chaban*, squealing and clicking their heels. Both the men and the women drank a very great deal, —there was only one bad feature; the thieves always wound up their sprees with ancient monetary misunderstandings, and loved to vanish without paying.

The fishermen used to come after lucky hauls, in big gangs of thirty or so. In late fall there were weeks so lucky that every fishery would catch daily some forty thousand mackerel or sea-bass. During such a time the smallest shareholder would earn more than two hundred roubles. But the fishermen were enriched still more by a successful haul of white sturgeon in winter; but then, this was fraught with great hardships. It was necessary to toil heavily, some thirty or forty *versts* [3] from shore, in the night-time; sometimes in inclement weather, when the water inundated the long-boat, immediately turning

[3] A *verst* equals two-thirds of a mile.—*Trans.*

to ice upon the clothes and oars, while the weather would keep them out at sea for two or three days at a time, until they were cast up some two hundred *versts* away, somewhere in Anap or Trebizond. Some ten yawls would disappear without a trace every winter, and only in spring did the waves bring in the corpses of the doughty fishermen, now on this strange shore, now on that.

But then, when they returned from the sea, safe and successful, a mad thirst of life would possess them on dry land. Several thousand roubles would be gone through in two or three days, in the coarsest, most deafening and drunken carousing. The fishermen got into a tavern or some other gay establishment; threw out all guests that "didn't belong"; closed the doors and shutters tightly; and for whole days at a stretch drank, gave themselves up to love, bawled out songs, beat up the mirrors, the crockery, and the women, and not infrequently one another, until sleep overcame them where they stood,—on the tables; the floor; across beds; among the spittle, cigarette stumps, broken glass, spilt wine and blood

stains. Thus would the fishermen carouse for several days running, sometimes changing to another place, sometimes remaining in the same one all the time. Having squandered everything to the last copper, with heads humming, with marks of battle on their faces, a-tremble from the after-effects of drink, morose, cast down and repentant, they would go down to the shore, to their barks, to take anew to their beloved and accursed, their arduous and alluring calling.

Never did they forget to pay a visit to the Gambrinus. They would break their way in, —huge, hoarse, with their red faces, scorched by the ferocious no'-wester of winter; in weather-proof jackets, in leathern breeches and in bull-hide boots up to their hips, in which their friends, in the midst of some stormy night, went down to the bottom like stones.

Out of respect for Sashka they did not expel other guests, even though they did feel themselves masters of the beer-shop, and did smash the heavy mugs against the floor. Sashka played for them their own fishermen's

songs, long drawn out, simple, and awesome, like the surge of the sea, and they all sang in unison, straining to the utmost their strong chests and their hardened throats. Sashka acted upon them like an Orpheus pacifying the waves, and there were occasions when some forty-year-old hetman of a bark, a bearded, virile animal, all weather-beaten, would be wallowing in tears, as he led, in a high voice, the singing of the touching words of a song:

Ah, I'm a poor, poor little laddie,
Born for to be a fisherman . . .

And sometimes they danced, stamping in one spot, stony-faced, thundering with their thirty-pound boots, and diffusing over the entire beer-hall the pungent salt odor of fish, with which their clothes and bodies had become saturated through and through. They were very generous toward Sashka, and would detain him long at their tables. Well did he know the manner of their hard, reckless existence. Often, as he played for them, he felt in his soul a certain reverential sadness.

But what he loved especially was to play for English sailors from merchant ships. These would come in a crowd, hand in hand,—all of them, as though they had been picked, chesty, broad-shouldered, young, white-toothed, with a healthy glow, with merry, courageous blue eyes. Strong sinews strained their jackets, while their straight, mighty, graceful necks rose up out of their low-cut collars. Some of them knew Sashka from their previous stays in this port. They would recognize him, and, showing their teeth in a cordial grin, would greet him in Russian:

"*Zdraist, zdraist.*" [1]

Sashka, of his own initiative, without being requested, would play *Rule Britannia* for them. Most probably, the consciousness that he found himself at present in a land oppressed by eternal slavery lent an especially proud solemnity to this hymn of English liberty. And when, standing, with heads bared, they sang the final, magnificent words:

"Britons never, never shall be slaves!"

[1] "Howd'y, howd'y."—*Trans.*

even the most riotous of their neighbors involuntarily doffed their hats.

The stocky boatswain, with an ear-ring in one ear, and with a beard that sprouted from his neck just like a fringe, would walk up to Sashka with two mugs of beer; slapping him amicably on the back, he would ask him to play a jig. At the very first strains of this rollicking maritime dance the Englishmen jumped up and cleared a space, moving the kegs to the walls. Permission to do this was asked from strangers by gestures and cheerful smiles; but if any did not comply quickly, that one was treated without any ceremony,—the seat was just knocked away from under him by a well-aimed kick. This, however, was but rarely resorted to, because every one in the Gambrinus was a connoisseur of dancing, and especially fond of the English jig. Even Sashka himself, without ceasing to play, would stand up on a chair to see better.

The sailors formed a ring, clapping their palms in time to the lively dance, the while two of them stepped out into the center. The dance depicted the life of a sailor afloat. The

ship is ready to sail; the weather is splendid; everything is ship-shape. The arms of the sailors are crossed on their breasts, their heads thrown back, their bodies still, although their feet are beating a frenzied tatoo. But now a slight breeze has sprung up,—the vessel begins to roll slightly. To a sailor this is nothing but a frolic,—the figures of the dance, however, are becoming more and more complicated and intricate. By now a fresh wind has begun to blow,—it is no longer such an easy matter to walk the deck,—the dancers are slightly rocking from side to side. And then, here is the real gale, at last,—the sailor is tossed from board to board; matters are becoming serious. "All hands aloft,—reef sails!" From the motions of the dancers it is comprehensible, to the verge of laughter, how they clamber with hand and foot up the shrouds, haul at the sails and make fast the sheets, the while the storm rocks the ship more and more. "Stop,—man overboard!" A boat is lowered. The dancers, with heads bent down, straining their mighty, bared necks, row with quick strokes, their backs

now bending, now straightening. The storm, however, passes; the rolling abates little by little; the sky clears up, and now the vessel is again running smoothly with a favorable wind, and once more the dancers, their bodies still, their arms crossed, are executing a merry, rapid jig.

Sashka also had occasion to play the *Lezginka* for Georgians, who followed wine-making in the environs of the city. For him there was no such thing as an unfamiliar dance. Whenever a solo dancer, in a tall shako and a long-skirted Circassian coat, was airily careering among the kegs, tossing now one hand, now the other behind his head, while his friends beat time with their palms and encouraged him with shouts, Sashka also could never hold out, and would cry out, with animation: "*Khas! Khas! Khas! Khas!*" There were also times when he played the Moldavian *Jok*, and the Italian *Tarantella*, and waltzes for German sailors.

There were times when fighting—and serious fighting, at that,—took place in the Gambrinus. Old frequenters loved to tell of a

legendary pitched battle between sailors of the Russian navy, sent to the reserves from some cruiser or other, and some English seamen. They fought with fists, *casse-têttes*, beer-mugs, and even threw the little kegs that served for seats at one another. It must be said, not to the credit of the Russian warriors, that they were the first to start the row, and were also the first to resort to knives, and that they crowded the Englishmen out of the beer-hall only after a battle of half an hour, although they exceeded them triply in numbers.

Very frequently Sashka's intervention stopped a quarrel which was only a hair's-breadth from bloodshed. He would walk up, jest, smile, grimace,—and immediately goblets would be extended to him from all sides.

"Sashka, just a lil' mug . . . Sashka, one on me . . ." Some would utter nonsensical conglomerations of nouns. Perhaps these simple, wild natures were influenced by this meek and fun-provoking mirth, gaily beaming from his eyes, hidden under the sloping skull? Perhaps it was reverence, of its own kind,

before talent, and something in the nature of gratitude? And perhaps it may also have been the additional circumstance that the majority of the *habitués* of Gambrinus consisted of Sashka's perpetual debtors. In the oppressive periods of being "on the rocks," which in the jargon of the port and the sea meant absolute impecuniousness, people turned to Sashka, freely and without fear of refusal, for small sums, or a trifling credit at the bar.

Of course, the debts were never repaid to him,—not through ill intent, but through forgetfulness; but these very debtors, at the height of a spree, repaid the loan tenfold for Sashka's songs.

The lady of the bar would at times lecture him:

"I really wonder, Sashka, how you can have no regard for your money?"

He would parry, argumentatively:

"But then, my dear Madame Ivanova. . . . Am I going to take it into the grave with me, or something? There's enough for Bielochka and me. Bielinka, my doggie, come here."

V

THE Gambrinus had song hits of its own, that appeared and had their season.

During Britain's war with the Boers, *The Boer March* flourished. (It seems that the famous fight of the Russian and English sailors is to be referred to this period.) Twenty times of an evening, at the least, would Sashka be compelled to play this heroic piece, and, without fail, all waved their caps and hurrahed at its conclusion, while all those who were indifferent were eyed askance, which was not at all a favorable omen at the Gambrinus.

Then the Franco-Russian celebrations came up. The mayor, with a wry face, granted permission to play the *Marseillaise.* This, also, was called for daily; yet not with as great a frequency as the Boer march,—the hurrahs were thinner and the cap waving was entirely absent. This occurred because, on the one

hand, there was no ground for the play of heart-felt emotions; while on the other hand the frequenters of Gambrinus did not sufficiently grasp the political importance of the alliance; and, again, it was remarked that the *Marseillaise* was called for, and the hurrahing done, by the very same people every evening.

A cake-walk tune did become all the rage for a moment; and once some light-headed little merchant, who had strayed in by chance, had danced it among the kegs, without taking off his raccoon coat, high galoshes, and fox cap. However, this negro dance was soon forgotten.

But now the great war with Japan came along. The frequenters of Gambrinus began to live at an exhilarated pace. Newspapers appeared on the kegs; the evenings were taken up with war arguments. The most peaceful and simple of men turned into politicians and strategists; but every one of them, in his inmost soul, was on tender-hooks,—if not for himself, then for a brother or, still more often, for some close friend; those days

brought out clearly that imperceptible and strong tie which cements men who have long shared toil, danger, and the daily proximity of death.

At first no one had any doubts of Russia's victory. Sashka secured somewhere *The Kuropatkin March,* and would play it twenty times of an evening, with a certain degree of success. But somehow, *The Kuropatkin March* was one evening forever crowded out by a song that some Balaclava fishermen,—"Salty Greeks," or *Pindossi,* as they were locally called,—had brought with them.

Oh, why did they take us to be soldiers?
To the Far East why do they send us to fight?
Can they put this fault upon our shoulders—
That we grew an extra inch in height?

From that time on they would have nothing else at the Gambrinus. Whole evenings through one heard nothing but the demand:

"Sasha,—the one that makes you suffer! The Balaclava one! The one about the reserves!"

They sang and wept and drank twice as

much as usually,—as, however, all Russia to a man was drinking then. Every evening some one came to bid farewell, putting on a brave front, strutting like a cook, casting his hat against the floor, with threats of worsting all the insignificant Japs single-handed,—and winding up, in tears, with the pathetic song.

One day Sashka arrived at the beer hall earlier than ever before. The bar manager, having filled his first mug, said, as was her wont:

"Sasha, play something of your own."

His lips suddenly twisted tearfully and the mug began to jump in his hand.

"Do you know what, Madame Ivanova?" he said, as though in bewilderment. "Why, they're taking me for a soldier . . . To the front."

Madame Ivanova threw up her hands.

"Why, it can't be, Sasha! Are you joking?"

"No," Sashka shook his head, despondently and submissively; "I'm not joking."

"But aren't you over the age limit, Sasha? How old are you?"

No one had been interested in this question up to now, somehow. Everybody thought that Sashka numbered just as many years as the walls of the beer-shop, the marquises, the Ukrainians, the frogs, and the guardian of the entrance, the daubed King Gambrinus himself.

"Forty-six." Sashka pondered. "And maybe forty-nine. I'm an orphan," he added, despondently.

"Then just you go and explain everything to the right people."

"I already went, Madame Ivanova; I already explained."

"And . . . Well?"

"Well, they told me: 'You mangy sheeny, you sheeny mug, you just talk a bit more—and you'll find yourself in the cooler . . .' And they hit me right here."

In the evening the news was known to all Gambrinus, and out of sympathy Sashka was made dead drunk. He tried to clown, to grimace, to squint; but nothing save sadness and horror peered out of his meek, droll eyes. One husky workingman, a boiler-maker by

trade, suddenly volunteered to go to war in Sashka's stead. The evident folly of such a proposition was plain to everybody, but it touched Sashka; he shed a tear, embraced the master boiler-maker, and presented him with his fiddle on the spot. As for Bielochka, he left her to the bar-manageress.

"Madame Ivanova, do you look after the doggie. Maybe I won't return, after all; so you should have something to remember Sashka by. Bielinka, my little dog! . . . Look, how she's licking her chops. . . Ah, my poor little darling. . . And there's something else I'd ask you, Madame Ivanova. There's some money coming to me from the proprietor, so you should take it and send it away. . . I'll write out the addresses for you. I have a cousin in Homel, he's got a family; and also in Zhmerinka lives my nephew's widow. Every month I send them. . . Well, that's the kind of people us Jews are. . . we like our relatives. As for me, I'm an orphan, I'm all alone. So good-bye, Madame Ivanova."

"Good-bye, Sashka. Well, now, let's kiss

each other good-bye at least. So many years. . . . And—don't you be angry—I shall make the sign of the cross over you for the journey."

Sashka's eyes were deeply pensive, but he could not refrain from clowning to the very last:

"But, now, won't I croak from the Russian cross?"

VI

GAMBRINUS became empty and abandoned, as though it had been orphaned without Sashka and his fiddle. The proprietor did try, as a sort of a lure, to invite a quartette of strolling mandolinists, of whom one was gotten up as an *opera bouffe* Englishman, with red mutton-chop whiskers and a false nose, in checked pantaloons and a collar that came above his ears, and whose performance on the stage consisted of comic couplets and shameless movements of his body. But the quartette had absolutely no success, on the contrary, the mandolinists were given the birds and pelted with remnants of sausages; as for the star comic, he was on one occasion beaten up by some fishermen from Tendrov, for mentioning Sashka disrespectfully.

However, for old memory's sake, Gambrinus was still visited by those of the fine fellows of the sea and the port whom war had not drawn into death and suffering. At first Sashka was recalled every evening:

"Eh, if we only had Sashka here now! The soul feels so cramped without him. . ."

"Yes-s . . . Where are you soaring now, dear, kind friend Sashenka?"

"In Manchu-u-uria's fields, far away . . ."

Some one would begin a new song of the moment; then, growing confused, become silent, while another would utter unexpectedly:

"There are usually three sorts of wounds: through and through; made by thrusts; and those made by hacking. And there are also those made by tearing . . .

Meself, in vict'ry I rejoice;

Youse, in an arm all torn away . . ."

"Here, stop croaking. . . . Madame Ivanova, isn't there any news from Sashka? A letter, or a bit of a postcard?"

Madame Ivanova now read newspapers whole evenings through, holding the sheet extended at an arm's length, her head thrown back and her lips moving. Bielochka lay upon her knees, occasionally snoring peacefully. The bar manageress was very far now from resembling a wide-awake captain, stand-

ing at his post; as for her crew, they wandered about the beer-hall, languid and sleepy.

Whenever Sashka's fate was enquired about, she slowly shook her head.

"Don't know anything. . . . There are no letters, and you can't tell anything from the papers."

Then, slowly taking off her spectacles, she would put them, together with the paper, alongside of the warm, comfortable Bilochka and, turning away, would sob quietly.

At times, bending down toward the little dog, she would say in a piteous, touching voice:

"What is it, Bielinka,—what is it, little doggie? Where is our Sashka? Where is our master?"

Bielochka would lift up her delicate little muzzle, winking her humid black eyes, and, in keeping with the tone of the manageress, would begin a low whine:

"A-oo-oo-oo . . . A-oof . . . A-oo-oo . . ."

But . . . time rounds out and washes away all things. The mandolinists were sup-

planted by balalaika players; the balalaika players by a female choir of Russians and Little Russians; and finally, one Leshka—a well-known concertina player, by profession a thief, but resolved on account of marriage to seek the paths of righteousness,—became the most strongly intrenched at the Gambrinus. He had long been known in divers taverns, and for that reason was tolerated here as well; but, outside of that, he was tolerated as a matter of necessity,—for things were going very badly with Gambrinus.

Months were going by; a year passed. None recalled Sashka now, save Madame Ivanova, and even she no longer wept at his name. Another year went by. Evidently, even the little white dog must have forgotten about Sashka.

But, in despite of his dubiousness, not only did Sashka not "croak" from the Russian cross, but was not wounded even once, although he had taken part in three great battles, and had once gone on an attack in front of a battalion, as part of the military band to which he had been assigned to play a flute.

At Vafangow he had been captured, and at the conclusion of the war brought by a German steamer to the very port where his friends toiled and rioted.

The news of his arrival spread, like an electric current, through all the harbors, jetties, wharves and workshops. . . . In the evening there were so many people in the Gambrinus that the majority had to stand, the mugs with beer being passed from hand to hand over their heads; and although many went away this day without paying, Gambrinus did more business than ever before. The boiler-maker brought Sashka's fiddle, solicitously wrapped in his wife's kerchief,—which latter he traded for drinks on the spot. From somewhere they searched out the accompanist that Sashka had had last. Leshka the concertina player, a man of self-esteem and self-conceit, did try to assert himself. "I'm paid by the day and I've got a contract!" he reiterated stubbornly. But he was simply chucked out of the door, and most probably would have been beaten, had it not been for Sashka's intervention.

Most assuredly, never a one of the fatherland's heroes of the Japanese war period encountered such a hearty and stormy reception as that which was held in honor of Sashka. Strong, gnarled arms caught him up, raised him up in the air, and tossed him up with such force that they almost dashed Sashka to pieces against the ceiling. And they yelled so deafeningly that the gas flames went out, while a policeman had to drop into the Gambrinus several times and implore them that they "be quieter, because, now, it sounds awful out on the street."

On this evening Sashka played through all the songs and dances beloved of the Gambrinus. He also played Japanese snatches, which he had learned by heart in captivity, but these did not please his audience. Madame Ivanova, just like one brought back to life, again kept vigilantly her little captain's bridge, while Bielka sat upon Sashka's knees and whined for joy. At times, when Sashka stopped playing, some simple-hearted fisherman, who had but just now comprehended the miracle of Sashka's return, would

suddenly exclaim, with naïve and jubilant amazement:

"Why, fellows, but this is Sashka!"

And the halls of the Gambrinus would be filled with deep neighing, and joyous ribaldry; and again they seized Sashka and tossed him up to the ceiling,—yelling, drinking, clinking glasses, and spilling beer over one another.

Sashka did not seem at all changed, nor had he aged during his absence: time and misfortunes had affected his appearance as little as they had that of the effigy of the sculptured Gambrinus, the guardian and patron of the beer-hall. But Madame Ivanova, with the sensitiveness of a feeling woman, noticed that that expression of horror and sadness which she had seen in Sashka's eyes when he had been bidding her farewell not only had not disappeared from them, but had become even more intense and significant. Sashka clowned, winked, and puckered the creases on his forehead as of yore, but Madame Ivanova sensed that he was playing a part.

VII

ALL things resumed their wonted course, just as though there had never been any such thing as the war, or Sashka's captivity at Nagasaki. A lucky haul of white sturgeon or *loban* would be celebrated as of yore by the fishermen in their seven-league boots; the sweethearts of the thieves danced as of yore; and Sashka played, the same as ever, the sailors' songs brought from all the harbors of the terrestrial globe.

But motley, changing, stormy times were already approaching. One evening the entire city began to hum and grew agitated, as though alarmed by a tocsin, and at an unusual hour the streets became black with people. Little sheets of paper went from hand to hand, together with the magic word Freedom,—that, on this evening, was repeated time without number by the entire unencompassable, trusting land.

There came a time of indescribably radi-

ant, festal, jubilant days, and their refulgence illumined even the subterranean Gambrinus. Students and workingmen came; came young, handsome maidens. Men, with their eyes flaming got up on the kegs which had seen so much in their days, and spoke. Not all their words were comprehended, but from that vehement hope and great love with which they rang the heart throbbed, opening to meet them.

"Sashka, the *Marseillaise!* Fire away! *The Marseillaise!*"

No, this did not at all resemble that *Marseillaise* which the mayor, averse at heart, had permitted to be played the week of the Franco-Russian transports. Endless processions, with flags and singing, went through the streets. Absolute strangers would, upon meeting, smile to each other and shake hands. . . .

But all this rejoicing vanished momentarily, just as though it had been washed away, like the marks of the little feet of children on a sea shore. One day an assistant to the head of police dashed into the Gambrinus,—a fat lit-

tle man, gasping, with his eyes popping out, and his complexion a very dark red, like an over-ripe tomato.

"What? Who's the proprietor here?" he bellowed hoarsely. "Fetch the proprietor!"

He suddenly laid eyes on Sashka, who was standing with his fiddle.

"You the proprietor? Silence! What? You'll play anthems, will you? No more anthems of any sort!"

"There will be no more anthems of any kind, your excellency," answered Sashka calmly.

The policeman turned livid, brought his index finger up to Sashka's very nose, and shook it ominously to the right and left.

"None what-so-ever!"

"I hear you, your excellency,—none whatsoever."

"I'll show you revolutions, I will!"

The police chief's assistant flew out of the beer-hall like a bomb, and despondency oppressed everybody after his departure.

And gloom descended upon the entire city as well. Dark, disquieting, loathsome ru-

mors were afloat. People spoke with cautiousness, fearing to betray themselves by a glance, frightened by their own shadow, dreading their own thoughts. The town, for the first time, bethought itself with horror of that cloaka which was in dull turmoil under its feet,—there below, near the sea,—into which cloaka it had been casting its poisonous excreta for so many years. The city put shields about the plate-glass windows of its magnificent stores, guarded its proud monuments with patrols, and, to be ready against any contingency, placed artillery in the yards of its splendid residences. In the meantime, on the outskirts of the city, in noisome cubby-holes and draughty garrets, prayed and wept in horror the chosen people of God,—long since forsaken by the wrathful God of the Bible, but up to the present believing that the measure of its heavy tribulations is not fulfilled.

Down below, near the sea, in the streets that resemble dark, viscid intestines, secret work was going on. The doors of the taverns, tea-houses, and the cheapest of lodging

houses, were open wide the whole night through.

The pogrom began in the morning. The same people who, touched by the general pure joyousness and moved by the radiance of an approaching brotherhood, had once marched through the streets singing, under symbols of the liberty they had won through battle,—the very same people were now marching to do murder; and not because they were commanded to do so, nor because they nurtured an enmity against the Jews, with whom they were often on terms of close friendship, nor even out of love for booty (which was problematical),—but because a foul, cunning fiend, that dwells within every man, was whispering in their ears: "Go. Everything shall be unpunished,—the forbidden curiosity of murder, the lust of rape, power over the life of another."

During the days of the pogroms Sashka, with his comical, ape-like, purely Hebraic physiognomy, went freely about the city. He was never annoyed. His was that incontrovertible courage of the soul, that *fearlessness*

of fear, which guards even the weakest of men better than all Browning revolvers. But once when, pressed against the side of a house, he was trying to avoid a crowd that was streaming like a hurricane over the entire width of a street, some mason in red blouse and white apron swung at him a cold chisel, snarling:

"Shee-eeny! Kill the sheeny! Get his blood!"

But some one seized his hand from behind.

"Stop, you devil,—why, it's Sashka! You thick-headed fool, damn your mother's heart and liver . . ." [1]

The stone-mason paused. At this drunken, insane, delirous moment he was ready to kill any one at all,—father, sister, priest; even the God of orthodoxy Himself; but he was also ready, like a child, to obey the command of any firmer will.

He bared his teeth in a grin, like an idiot, spat aside, and wiped his nose with his hand. But suddenly his eyes fell upon the nervous

[1] The Russian, though veiled, is far more—piquant.—*Trans.*

little white dog, that, trembling, was hovering about Sashka. Stooping quickly, he seized it by its hind legs, raised it high, dashed its head against the plates of the side-walk, and started running. Sashka watched him in silence. He ran, bending forward, with hands extended, hatless, open-mouthed, his eyes round and white in insanity.

Some brain from Beilochka's head had spattered upon Sashka's boots. Sashka wiped off the spot with a handkerchief.

VIII

THEN ensued a strange period, like the dreaming of a man in paralysis. In the city not a light showed in a single window; but, on the other hand, the fiery signs of *cafés chantants* and the windows of little taverns flamed brightly. The conquerors were testing their power, not being yet sated fully with their impunity. Certain unbridled people, in Manchurian shakos, with ribbons of St. George in the buttonholes of their jackets, made the rounds of the restaurants and with insistent impudence demanded that the national hymn be played, and saw that every one arose. They also broke into private apartments, rummaging in beds and bureaus, demanding whisky, money, and the anthem, and filling the air with their drunken belching.

One day ten of them came into the Gambrinus and took up two tables. They deported themselves in the most provocative

manner, treating the help domineeringly, spitting over the shoulders of their unknown neighbors, putting their feet on the seats of others, splashing their beer out on the floor, under the pretense that it was flat. None would have anything to do with them. Everybody knew that these were detectives, and regarded them with the same secret horror and squeamish curiosity with which the general mass of simple folk regard hangmen. One of them was evidently the ring-leader. This was a certain Motka Gundossiy,[1]—red-headed, snuffling, with a nose that had been broken; a man of great physical strength (so it was said), a converted Jew, an erstwhile thief, a bouncer in a brothel next, and then a souteneur and catchpole.

Sashka was playing *The Snow Storm*. Suddenly Gundossiy walked up to him, seized fast his right hand, and, turning around to the audience, cried out:

[1] A mimicking nick-name for a pug-nosed fellow, consisting of a mispronunciation of *kurnossiy*—pug-nosed; which mispronunciation is a natural concomitant of the snuffling speech of such fellows. This wonderfully deft bit of characterization is thoroughly Kuprinian.—*Trans.*

"The Hymn! The National Hymn! In honor of our adored monarch, fellows. . . . The Hymn!"

"The Hymn! The Hymn!" came the droning chorus of the scoundrels in shakos.

"The Hymn!" called out a solitary, uncertain voice in the background.

But Sashka pulled away his hand, and calmly said:

"There won't be any hymns."

"What?" roared Gundossiy; "you won't obey! Oh, you stinking sheeny!"

Sashka bent forward, almost up against Gundossiy, and, his face all puckered up, holding his lowered fiddle by the neck, asked:

"And you?"

"What about me?"

"I'm a stinking sheeny. Well, all right. And you?"

"I'm orthodox."

"Orthodox? And for how much?"

All Gambrinus burst into laughter, while Gundossiy, all white from anger, turned around to his comrades:

"Brethren," he was declaring, in a tremu-

lous, plaintive voice, the memorized words of some other, "Brethren, how long will we stand for the sheenies reviling our throne and holy church? . . ."

But Sashka, getting up on his elevation, with a single sound compelled him to face him again, and never could any frequenter of Gambrinus have believed that this funny, clowning Sashka was capable of speaking with such impressiveness and force:

"You!" cried out Sashka, "you, you son of a bitch! Show me your face, you murderer. . . . Look at me! . . . *Nu!*"

Everything happened within a speeding moment. Shaska's fiddle was raised high, flashed quickly through the air, and—crash!—the tall man in the shako swayed from a ringing blow on the temple. The fiddle flew into pieces. Only its neck, raised victoriously above the heads of the crowd, remained in Sashka's hands.

"He-elp, mateys!" Gundossiy began to roar.

But it was too late to help him. A mighty wall surrounded Sashka, screening him. And

the same wall bore the men in shakos out into the street.

But an hour later when Sashka, having finished for the day, was coming out of the beer-hall, several men threw themselves upon him. Some one of their number hit Sashka in the eye, blew a whistle, and said to the roundsman who had come on the run:

"Take him to the boulevard station house. It's a political matter. Here's my badge."

IX

NOW for the second time, and definitely, Sashka was considered as put away beneath the ground. Some one had witnessed the entire scene that had taken place on the sidewalk near the beer-hall, and had informed the others of it. And the people who convened in the Gambrinus were worldly-wise, knowing full well just what sort of an institution the boulevard station house was, and just what a thing the revenge of detectives.

But now there was far less disquiet about Sashka's fate than there had been the first time, and he was forgotten far more quickly. Two months later in his place was seated a new fiddler (Sashka's pupil, by the way), whom the accompanist had searched out.

And then, three months later, one quiet autumn evening, as the musicians were playing the waltz *Expectancy,* somebody, in affright, exclaimed in a high voice:

"Fellows,—Sashka!"

All turned around and got up from their kegs. Yes, it was he,—the twice resurgent Sashka, but now bearded, emaciated, pale. They all made a rush for him, surrounding him, squeezing and mauling him, thrusting mugs of beer upon him. But suddenly the same voice cried out:

"Fellows,—look at his arm! . . ."

A sudden silence fell upon them all. Sashka's left arm, screwed up and as though crumpled, was pressed to his side at the elbow. Evidently, it could neither bend nor unbend, while the fingers were forever stuck near the chin.

"What's up with you, matey?" finally asked a hirsute boatswain of The Russian Company.

"Eh, nonsense. . . . That's just a sinew, or something, . . ." Sashka answered, with never a care.

"So-o."

Again there was a brief but total silence.

"Then it's all over with the *Chaban* as well?" asked the boatswain commiseratingly.

"*Chaban?*" repeated Sashka, and his eyes

began to sparkle. "Hey there!" he commanded the accompanist, with his usual assurance: "*The Chaban! Ein, zwei, drei!* . . ."

The pianist began the quick tempo of the rollicking dance, looking over his shoulder with mistrust. But Sashka, with his whole hand, took out of his pocket some sort of a small, elongated black instrument, about as large as the palm of the hand and with a stem; he put this stem in his mouth, and, bending his entire body as much to the left as his maimed, motionless arm permitted, suddenly began piping on the ocarina the deafeningly-mirthful *Chaban.*

"Ho-ho-ho!" the spectators went into peals of joyous laughter.

"The devil!" exclaimed the boatswain, and, altogether unexpectedly, even to himself, executed a skillful step and started doing the rapid figures of the dance. Caught up by his impulse all the guests, women as well as men, began dancing. Even the waiters, trying not to lose their dignity, smilingly shuffled in one spot. Even Madame Ivanova, forgetting the duties of a captain on watch, was nodding her

head in time to the fiery dance, and snapping her fingers softly. And, perhaps, even old porous Gambrinus himself, gnawed through and through by time, may have been moving his eyebrows, gazing gayly out on the street; and in the hands of the maimed, contorted Sashka, the sorry, naïve penny whistle seemed to be chanting, in a tongue as yet—alas!—comprehensible neither to the friends of Gambrinus, nor even to Sashka himself:

"Nothing matters! Man may be crippled —but art will endure all things, and will all things conquer!"

MONTE CARLO

Monte Carlo

I MUST again repeat, kind and respected readers: believe not the Baedekers, nor even the writers. They will tell you that "Monte Carlo is an earthly paradise; there, in luxuriant gardens, the feathery fronds of the palms rustle softly, and lemon and orange trees are in bloom, while exotic fishes plash in magnificent pools." They will tell you of the glorious castle, builded with kingly extravagance by the best architects in the world; adorned by the most talented sculptors, and decorated by the foremost masters of the brush.

In reality, there is nothing of all this. A small, squat building; in color, something like pistachio, or thin *café au lait*, or else *couleur de caca Dauphin;* fat-buttocked Venuses, with lubriciously smiling eyes, and bloated cupidons, have been scattered over ceiling and walls by house-painters; the bronzes are imi-

tations; there are busts of great writers, who had never in their lives seen Monte Carlo,—or have never had anything to do with it, it seems. . . .

For Monte Carlo is, after all, nothing but a dive, erected by the enterprising, talented Blan, upon a bare and barren rock.

This doubtlessly clever man, whose will, it is to be regretted, was of an evil bent,—a man who, with his never-betraying luck, might have been a train sneak thief, or a black-mailer, or a minister of state, or a restaurateur, or an insurance agent, or editor of a gigantic newspaper, or keeper of a house of ill fame, and so on, and so on,—once decided to exploit human folly and greed. Nor did he err. This beggar, this tatterdemallion,—a man of a dark past, a knight of the dark star,—died lamented of all the inhabitants of the principality of Monaco, and had succeeded not only in marrying his daughters to princes of the blood royal, but even in providing for all time for his benefactor, Grimaldi; setting him up with an artillery of two

cannons, an infantry amounting to twenty officers and five men, and a cavalry, in the shape of a block-head, who, embroidered all over with gold, sits on his horse and yawns from *ennui,* not knowing how to kill the useless time.

However, Blan had foresight enough to forbid entry to his gambling hall to all Monegascs (the inhabitants of Monaco), including even Grimaldi in that category.

The following anecdote (I apologize if it has seen print before) bears witness to the will and training of the man: Some Spanish grandee or other arrived at Monte Carlo, and was favored by a madman's luck. In two or three days he had won some two or three million francs, and bore them home with him, to his Seville, to his bullocks and oranges. But after two years he again felt the urge of gambling, and he returned to Blan in Monte Carlo. Blan met him very amiably and courteously, and even seemed glad to see him.

"How happy I am to see you, Count! Only,—I warn you: do not play. Luck does not come to a man twice. And—believe me

sincere—I would advise you against even entering the gambling hall."

"Why? Do you really think my self-possession would not suffice? Or that the game will carry me away?"

"Oh, of course not, Count. I do not doubt you. All my banks are open to you. Still, I entreat you earnestly,—do not play. Again and again I reiterate to you, that luck is treacherous. At least, promise me that you will not lose over twenty francs?"

"Drop the subject. Please do not hinder me. I will show you right now that the gambling fever hasn't the least power over me!!"

It ended inevitably in the Spanish count's losing the three million he had previously won; mortgaging at his bank, by telegraph, his lands and orangegroves; but he no longer could get away from Monte Carlo. He fell down on his knees before Blan, and kissed his hands, imploring him with tears for a few hundred francs to enable him to return to his family, to the glorious climate of Spain, to his black bullocks with tiny white stars on their foreheads, to his orange groves and his

toreadors. But the calm Blan answered him dryly and coldly:

"No, Count. Two years ago you ruined me. It was necessary for me to go to Paris and to wear out all the steps and thresholds of ministries and newspaper sanctums, in order to wall up the breach which you had made in my enterprise. An eye for an eye. Now you shall never see compassion from me, —but I can give you alms."

And ever since the Spanish count, like a rooster whose tail feathers have been plucked, is constantly contemplating the retrieval of his fortune. The administration of the dive, at the generous dispensation of Blan, doles out to him twenty francs a day (approximately, seven *roubles*, in our reckoning [1]). He has the right of entry to the Casino, and is even permitted to play. But whenever he loses his pitiful twenty francs, they are not taken from him; and whenever he wins, he is not paid. A more abominable hulk, or a greedier, —thus saith the legend,—none has ever be-

[1] Written at a time when both francs and *roubles* were normal—the *rouble* being worth about half an American dollar.—*Trans.*

held on the azure shores. And, at a modest estimate, there are some four thousand of such people knocking about in Monte Carlo.

Such was Blan's grasp of human psychology. Every winner would return to him to win once more; and every loser, to win his money back again. Nor was he at all amiss in his cynical estimate of one of the basest of human passions. Rest in peace, thou gentle worker. For men are worthy of whatsoever treatment they deserve.

The details of organization of this business are simple, to the verge of laughter. Every croupier undergoes a schooling of two years' instruction; for two years does he sit in the basements of the Casino and learn to send a little ball over a whirling disc; learning to remember faces and costumes, to speak all languages, and to wear clean linen. Their wives and daughters are provided for by the administration,—small tobacco and wine shops are opened for them. And thus these people are chained by unbreakable ties to the whirling plate and the little ball hopping upon it. And, truly,—where may one turn if he

has been formerly a croupier, or a precinct inspector?

The talk of a croupier being able to put the ball in any one of the thirty-seven little cups is, I think, without foundation; but that he is able to drive the ball into a given sector is possible. Firstly, because human dexterity has no bounds (witness acrobats, aviators, sharpers), and secondly, because I have myself seen an inspector of the playing change, within one hour, three croupiers who had been losing one after the other.

These hundreds of people,—no, not even people, but only gamblers,—produce a pitiful and repulsive impression, huddled over the green cloth covered tables! Some forty or fifty men and women are sitting, jostling one another with elbows and hips; a second row has piled on them from behind, while still farther back is a crush, with grasping, perspiring, moist hands thrust over the heads of the foremost. In passing, a *roué's* elbow strikes the cheek or bosom of some beautiful woman or girl. A mere trifle! No one pays any attention to this. . . .

But then, how interesting a certain Russian countess was! She had a nervous *tic* of the eyes, and her hands trembled from age and the fever of gambling. Out of a white chamois bag, something like a pouch, she took out gold by the handful, and flung it on the cloth at random. The chief croupier, the one who set the device whirling,—a fat Frenchman, with an ugly red face,—purposely delayed the game and laughed straight in the face of the woman.

It must be said that she paid no attention to this, and, when she had lost everything, she ordered somebody to call her automobile and somebody else to pay for the two glasses of strong tea she had drunk, and departed. After all, it was handsomely done.

What a pity that Russian women, so tenderly and poetically drawn by Turgeniev, Tolstoi, and Nekrassov, should inevitably get into this accursed hole!

The entire French press is prostituted by the authorities of Monte Carlo with unusual

adroitness and calmness. These honest journalists,—of whom only Count Henri de Rochefort is genuinely honest and incorruptible,—are deliberately paid not to write of the suicides that occur on this bare rock. The honest journalists, of course, begin to blackmail the gambling hell, and write exclusively of suicides until they receive thirty or forty thousand francs as quittance. That is all the administration needs. It does not at all value five-franc players,—rather, it lies in wait for millionaires. And it is quite evident that a sated block-head, who had experienced during the twenty-five years of his hot-house existence almost everything that the imagination of man—or, rather, of a flunkey—may conceive: from hunting tigers to the sin of sodomy,—it is quite evident that such a charming youth would be inevitably drawn to experience strong sensations. And that is why the directors of the dive from time to time with great magnanimity, grant the opportunity of winning a few thousand francs to some nabob traveling incognito. It is evident, even to one blind, that this money is thrown

out by the administration for the *réclame,* or, to put it more plainly, it is considered as *pot boire,* or pin money. . . .

My testimony is unprejudiced, because among my numerous vices one is missing,—a longing for cards. I was merely a dispassionate and an attentive observer. Unexpectedly, I won a few francs, but it was a disgusting and a dreary business.

The corrupting influence of Monte Carlo is to be felt everywhere upon the azure shores. And, looked at more attentively, one seems to have fallen into some plague-stricken spot, in the grip of an epidemic,—a place which it would be of great benefit to pour kerosene over and to burn down. In every bar, in every tobacco shop, in every hotel, stand machines for gambling,—resembling the cash registers in big stores. At the top are three colors: yellow, green, red; or else, three toy horses: a black, a bay, and a gray. Sometimes, however, there are little cats, with three openings above them, as in a toy savings-

bank, to drop in the coins. If you guess the color, you win. And the kind, simple-hearted house-painters and stone-cutters, car-conductors, porters, waiters, prostitutes, keep on, from morn till night, putting their hard-earned sous into this insatiable maw. Of course, they do not understand that the machine has sixty-six and a fraction chances of winning, as against theirs. And these sixty-six percent are shared in this manner: the owner of the machine receives forty-four percent, while the keeper of the little inn gets twenty-two. It must be said that the inn-keeper, whenever any one wins, prefers to pay not in money, but in drinks,—sweet vermouth, or fiery absinthe.

As for the amateurs of more spicy gambling,—there are secret, shady haunts for them, all over the azure shore. One of these —the most noteworthy—has come into being in a small hamlet that goes by the name of Trinité, some twenty *versts* from Nice, among mountains over which runs a white paved road, built by Roman sovereigns, and rebuilt by Napoleon (Corniche). Wine and cold

meats are "on the house." The minimum stake is a franc (in Monte Carlo it is five francs). Anybody at all is admitted. None will be offended if, at the height of the game, one remove his coat and vest.

But then, it is assuredly an astonishing collection of human refuse that gathers here: croupiers, expelled from Monte Carlo for cheating, with something of the hangman in their faces, or of the catchpole, or of the billiard-marker; little old ladies, with noble profiles, who, as they get off the tram, hastily make the sign of the cross under cover of their mantles, and, if they catch sight of a hunchback, rush to touch his hump for luck; Russian sharpers, who have brought their modest savings, gleaned at St. Petersburg, to the azure shores, and inevitably lose everything (this is their common fate); international personages, to whom entry into Monte Carlo is forbidden, either for stealing somebody else's stake, or for the unsuccessful extraction of a wallet from a stranger's pocket; disguised police agents. . . . In a word, it is a cordial, gay, intimate gathering. . . .

However, one insane idea never forsakes any one of them: "The roulette has laws of its own!" It is only necessary to discover the key to them. And so these lunatics sit whole days through, combining numbers, multiplying them by one another, extracting their square roots. The administration looks upon them as harmless maniacs, and does not apply any measures of restriction to them.

True, a game in Trinité often winds up in a fracas, or a thrust of the knife into the abdomen, but nobody pays any attention to such trifles in Trinité.

And yet, after all, how interesting French manners are! Even in these dives our generous southern friends cannot do without a gesture.

General Goiron, just elected mayor of Nice, evinced a natural desire to demonstrate his civic rigor and administrative activity. Therefore, he ordered the closing of all gaming houses in Trinité,—and there are some ten or fifteen of them there. A raid was ar-

ranged. The gamblers scattered in terror, each one for himself. Monsieur Paul, organizer of the most important establishment, was also in flight, pursued by a police commissioner. And lo! the commissioner, as he runs, sprains his foot,—or, perhaps, merely pretends having sprained it. Whereupon Monsieur Paul halts and with the magnanimity of an honest adversary, assists his pursuer to arise, puts him into a carriage, attends upon him precisely like a solicitous nurse, and brings him with pomp into the town. The next day between the two newspapers of Nice, who usually are not averse to sling a little mud at each other, a touching unison reigns. In one, there is a leader, whose theme is that French chivalry is not yet dead; while in the other is a *feuilleton:* "The Magnanimous Foes."

And the day after in both newspapers there are two items, the same, almost word for word: "It is to be regretted that the struggle with the lust for gambling for money is beyond the strength of our police in Nice. Monsieur Paul has again opened his gaming house

in Trinité, from ten until two in the afternoon, and from four until eight in the evening; here, also, is to be found a magnificent *buffet*, which Maître Paul, with that hospitality which is so natural to every Frenchman, places at the service of all visitors, entirely without charge. Smoking is permitted; the air is salubrious, and the landscape most beautiful, the best throughout the entire azure coast."

No! Russion reporters, whom some one has dubbed "free lunch grafters," will never attain the high culture of their *confrères* in the south!

ROACH HOLE

Roach Hole

AND really, neither I nor anybody else could ever meet, in a lifetime, a fellow queerer, quainter, and, at the same time, more touching. He was a man of small stature, as black as a black cockroach, with an enormous black beard; he was prematurely bald, but his eyes were glowing, beautiful, and somewhat unhealthy.

He was always full of protests, complaints, plans for inventions, letters to newspapers, letters of recommendation for servants, and so forth.

He would burst into our quarters—a students' garret, rented by Goliyashkin—and would suddenly yell, all beside himself:

"It's an outrage! How is it that nobody surmises that candle factories nowadays really represent something in the nature of a swindling American Trust: the stearine is mixed with kerosene! The wicks are satu-

rated through and through with kerosene! It is therefore perfectly evident, even to a two-year-old infant, that nowadays candles burn four times as fast as a normal candle should, and that, therefore, I am paying to a syndicate—or how the devil do you call it?—as much for one candle consumed as I ought to pay for four candles! And everybody knows this, and nobody protests!"

After a lapse of time he would again come running to us, and would shout in horror:

"Oh, yes! Are you resting on your laurels? But have you paid any attention to the fact that the designs on the government bank-note,—that is, to put it more correctly, on the promissory notes of the government,—are changed every year?"

And, hurriedly masticating a piece of bologna, and scalding himself with tea, he continued:

"And then, some Penza *moujik* or other, a numskull who is not only illiterate but even worships the pagan gods Valiess and Dazhd-Bog,—such a *moujik* is caught in a trap! Somewhere in town notices have been posted

up to the effect that the bills will be honored until such and such a date only; the matter is spoken of even in churches," the Roach again scalds himself with the tea, "from the ambo. . . . But then, a *moujik* does not carry his savings to a government bank, but prefers to hide them in a barn, in the horse mangers, or to bury them under the old apple tree. The time comes for him to die. He or his sons exhume the treasure trove out of its hidden place and carry it off to cash it. But an official, in splendid linen, with buttons and shoulder-straps, tells them most calmly: 'These bills cannot be accepted.' What are we to see in that? Isn't it an attempt upon the draw-string purse of the good old fifty-million population?"

Becoming infatuated with this lode, he came to us again four days later, but very much tired, done up, as though he were giving up his last strength to his call:

"Tell me!" he clamored, "why do they mint such abominable silver coins nowadays?! Those of the reigns of Peter the Great, of Catherine, and even those of Nicholas—Nich-

olas the First—survive sturdily to this day, and, when one strikes them on the marble slab at an inn, ring true! On the other hand, coins of the present day, even those truly genuine, are rubbed off within a year,—both head and tail. And the scoundrelly shopkeeper does not even try them, but simply flings them back at you, saying 'Can't tell what coin that is. All rubbed off. Let's have newer coins!' Same thing with gold. Just recall, my children, how, almost three centuries ago, they wanted to fool the people with just such a little stunt, and how the matter came to the knowledge of the highest authorities, and how the ringleaders in this affair had their mouths filled with molten silver and gold? Eh? Am I not telling the truth, perhaps? And tell me, please, why are the gold pieces of the present day called *metaux d'or?* If you can't understand anything about it, neither can I, I confess! Oh, well, all you know is to neigh like stallions when they feel their oats. Funny, is it?" And he spat in disgust.

And, finishing his tea, which had grown

cold by now, he would hurriedly tell us good-by, extending to each one of us in turn his small, dry, rigid, warm hand, and would run off somewheres into space, like an unidentified splinter from some wandering planet.

However, I once managed, somehow, to visit his lodgings,—a rumor that he was seriously ill had reached me, and I found out where he lived through the government bureau of addresses. I had to travel to the Skolniki,[1] almost at the edge of the world; and, of course, this was in the heart of winter,—about Christmas, I think,—in the midst of a raging blizzard. With the greatest difficulty I succeeded in finding his room. . . . However, this was neither a room, nor a mansard, nor even a garret, but something that resembled, rather, a dove-cote or a bird-house for starlings, through the cracks of which the wind tore in freely from the outside. A kitchen table . . . a wooden tabouret . . . some felt spread on the floor, and on it, under an old torn fur coat, lies this amazing Black Roach, who is

[1] A suburb of Moscow.—*Trans.*

shivering in a fever ague and is delirious at times. He refused the offices of a doctor, as well as the offer of the money which we had somehow managed to scrape together in our bohemian crowd. (It must be said that of all the people I have ever seen the Roach was the proudest and most disinterested one.) It was necessary to send him in a hired cab to a hospital, when he fell into an absolute coma. Of colossal strength must have been the organism of this Black Roach, whom neither the frosts of Moscow, nor the severest form of typhoid, could subdue.

Incidentally, I managed to notice a remarkable thing in this beggarly hole, which was called a separate room from that of the other inmates of the house: on the floor, on the table, and on the window sill there was a vast number of books piled up,—some of them exceeding rarities, others in antique bindings of calf- and pig-skin, with gold inlays. Here were the works of the great Fathers of the Church and the teachers: of Basil the Great, Tertullian, Origen, John of the Golden Lips, the Blessed Augustine, and others.

Really, the Black Roach absolutely amazed me at every step.

We would lose track of him for a year, for two years, for three years at a time. Many of us had already died during this period, and one even underwent (through a misunderstanding, however) capital punishment, by hanging; but the Roach remained just as he was, and somehow did not even seem changed in appearance. And—what is strangest of all!—his character, which was not of this earth, his passion for exposures, and his civic indignation, which was somehow aimless, not only did not pass away with the years, but, it seemed, kept on constantly increasing. Now he would be carrying Dukhobori into Canada (into Vancouver); then growing asparagus in the mountainous regions on the ridge of Yaila, in Crimea; next he became a *regisseur* in a fashionable theater. (May the Lord slay me if I can understand what he had to do with the dramatic art!) When decadence became the rage, he bravely started studying

painting, and even attained to the exhibition of female nudes, green in color, with violet hair and with wreaths of yellow flowers upon their heads. Later, rumors reached me somehow of his having held a position in a circus as referee in wrestling bouts, and even, I think, as a swallower of burning tow, of salamanders, adders, frogs, and an "Eat-'em-alive!" of cats, under the pseudonym of "Captain Greig, the Man with the Iron and Incombustible Stomach." He was, likewise, a horticulturist, the editor of a yellow sheet, a representative for some rubber manufacturers, a tax comptroller, and a boatswain on a sailing vessel. Now, when his entire life is a thing of the past, I sometimes, in the periods of insomnia, recall him with tenderness and wonder,—where didn't life (and, it may have been, curiosity) toss this man? I have forgotten to say that I knew something of his past. In his early youth he had served in a cavalry guard and had participated with immense success in gentlemanly races and steeple chases. Neither fears nor complicating difficulties existed for him: he could take

any obstacle on any horse, as easy as cracking a nut. True, like every daring horseman, he had frequent spills. Almost all the parts of his arms and legs had been broken and had grown together again clumsily. As for his exit from the regiment,—that was due to some absurd incident, in which, however, supersensitive *corps d'esprit* was far more at fault than he.

Frequently he disappeared from our midst, as though he had been swallowed up by the ocean. Nevertheless, fate inevitably threw us together.

The Russo-Japanese War burst into a blaze. And so I was simply convinced that he would prove to be there, "in the war zone." And I was not mistaken. In one of the relayed dispatches I unexpectedly read that Captain of the Cavalry So-and-so, retired, had distinguished himself by his amazing valor at such-and-such a retreat, and had been awarded the Order of St. Vladimir of the Third Rank (with swords). This man interested me to

such a degree,—or, rather, had grown so close to my heart,—that I, with absolute composure, even though not without a certain secret curiosity, waited to see how he would end.

When the war quieted down, the Roach came back to Russia with two Crosses of St. George and with a black bandage over his left eye.

"It's abominable! It's outrageous!" he stormed,—the same native of the shores of the Black Sea that he had always been, but by now already markedly gray. "They've sold the fatherland, the worthless scoundrels! They made hay while the sun shone! Deserted their positions, in order to lodge complaints! Kept up harems! Oh, if they'd only let me lay my hands on these skunks! . . ."

And right here came the Ninth of January, the Seventeenth of October, Gapon, Schmidt, and, in general, the whole Russian muddle of the first revolution. Of course he, like an imp or chimney-sweep Jack-in-the-box, had to show his mettle even here. He made speeches

somewhere, which no one understood,—and really, did he understand anything in them himself? Still, he was borne in the arms of the crowds, tossed aloft, and kissed.

But, in the meanwhile, the times were changing with unusual rapidity, and the destinies of the empire with them. Our little society of students was dispersed, every man going his own way. Some died, others became celebrities, fashionable physicians, or well-known lawyers; but for some reason this man, this Black Roach so dear to me, was decreed by fate always to encounter me.

"It's an outrage!" he clamored, bursting into my rooms like a bomb. "A system of stool-pigeons! Stool-pigeons everywhere! A huge system! Men have lost all shame, fear, and conscience! Why, can one be sure that when a man is carrying a bomb in his hand he has not received four months' salary for doing it? I can't bear it any more! I shall expose these worthless scoundrels!"

It was amazing! Neither age, nor the wounds he had received in the war, nor fatigue from the intense life he had led, seemed to

have any effect upon him. Every step in the life of Russia as a society was reflected in him as in a mirror,—but some sort of a droll mirror, such as are found in dime musees and panopticums, in which a man expands infinitely in breadth, or else suddenly increases in height and becomes as thin as a tapeworm.

And now a comparatively quiet time comes along. The Russian Parliament opens, and my Black Roach dashes off at a mad pace into some province or other, obtains dubious funds somewhere and buys the land necessary to secure an electorate, and exactly one year later, sitting in the galleries of the Tabriz Palace, I hear him delivering a thundering speech,—in any case, one not meant for the benefit of the government. I confess that, owing to the memories of my youth, I had preserved a sort of apprehensive tenderness toward him; and, as I listened to him, I feared all the time to see soldiers and jailers enter at any second and put hand-cuffs and leg-irons upon him, and take him away into tiny, narrow government quarters.

"The waves still mutter the same old thing.

. . . Statute One-hundred-and-twenty still mutters the same old thing. . . . The many-headed tail of the old *régime,* having entwined with its sting well nigh one third of the terrestrial globe . . ."

Here the chairman stopped him and ordered him out of the room. He was muttering something else in the doorway, but I could no longer distinguish anything of what he was saying.

I had almost given up hope of meeting him after this scandal; but you can imagine my astonishment at meeting him both the next year, and the year after that,—in short, during all the sessions of Parliament in the self-same Tabriz Palace. With horror and with pity I watched this harebrained and irrepressible man fade more and more with every year. Subsequently he changed from the S-R's (Social Revolutionaries) to the Laborites; thence he dived into the ranks of the conservative Cadets; and, finally, sunk until he touched the Octobrists. Frequently of

evenings, when I would be alone, I pondered on the destiny of this amazing fellow. "What drew him toward all these strange—let us say —changes of views? Can it be," thought I, "an echo of the peculiarly Russo-Tartarian restlessness and wanderlust? Or is it simply lack of steadfastness in spirit, so deeply inherent in the nature of our splendid nation?" And immediately I would contradict myself, saying that this man was sober, continent, a vegetarian, and a non-smoker. . . . But at the same time I could not admit that he was mad.

And then, a few months later, the Balkan War begins,—probably the cruelest war of all those that have been fought in this world. With huge amazement I read in the papers that my friend is Little-Johnny-on-the-spot; the Black Roach is now in the ranks of the Bulgarian troops.

Thereupon I begin to be interested in his destiny. Through certain friends I contrive to telegraph inquiries about him. But no! The waters seem to have swallowed him up, as the saying is. "Must have reached the end

of his game," thought I; "probably he is lying in some ditch or hollow, crushed under scores of corpses; or, perhaps, he is asprawl in some field, with his ears and nose cut off, with his eyes gouged out,—or has he, perhaps, been turned into corruption and dust long since?"

I must confess that a genuine, sincere regret possessed me.

But life runs on and on, and to make it pause is a difficult matter. . . . And the troubles of the day make everything in the world to be lightly forgotten. And I almost forgot about the friend of my youth,—and then suddenly I received a curious postal card from Athos. Some monastery was depicted upon the side of it, with white buildings, surrounded by green trees; upon the other was the address,—in an obviously tremulous handwriting; and right near the address, to the left, a few lines were tacked on, written in the same jumpy handwriting. At the beginning of these lines stood a funerary cross, done in ink:

✠

and then the following words:

"To-morrow I am invested with the Great Schema,[1] and take a vow of silence. I bless you and everybody else, and always remember all of you in my ardent prayers. I pray God that He may send contrition, love, and compassion into all your hearts as well. This is the last letter that I shall write as long as I live,—to-morrow I shall be dead for the world forever. My library is still there, at the Sokolniki, with the landlady; take it, and, I beg of you, distribute the books among all those who remember me. And may the mercy of God be over you.

"The lowly monk of the schema,

AGATHANGEL."

Well, what was to be done? The thing was over with. I wept over this bit of tidings, come from God knows what land. And what touched me was not so much the fate of my friend, as the fate of the entire turbulent Russian people, ever seeking something, it knows not what. And truly! Was he not the most faithful, the most typical representative of it?

[1] The schema is the habit worn by Russian monks of the greatest asceticism.—*Trans.*

I pictured him to myself,—the erstwhile *bretteur* and horseman—sitting in a cell, sustaining himself with a single red cross bun a day, sleeping in a coffin of cypress wood, which he had made with his own hands, and, most terrible of all, keeping silent—he! the indefatigable, the irrepressible!

THE DISCIPLE

The Disciple

THE great white double-decked steamer, built after an American pattern, was gayly floating down the Volga. It was the time of sultry, languid July days. The passengers passed half the day on the little outside western balcony, and the other half on the eastern,—it all depended on which side the shade was. They got on and clambered off at the intermediate stops, and finally there was formed a permanent complement of travelers, whose faces had long since become mutually familiar and who had grown rather tedious to one another.

During the day they occupied themselves with indolent flirting, with buying strawberries, sun-cured, stringy fish, milk, cracknels, and sturgeons that smelt of kerosene. They ate without cease all day long, as is always the case on steamers, where the jolting of the vessel, the fresh air, the proximity of the

water, and the *ennui* all develop an inordinate appetite.

In the evening, when it grew cooler, the scent of new-mown hay and of honey-yielding flowers would be borne to the deck from the river banks, and, when a dense summer mist would arise from the river, everybody gathered in the saloon.

A thin little miss from Moscow, who had studied at a conservatory,—the bones of her breast stood out sharply from her low-cut little blouse, while her eyes had an unnatural sparkle and her cheeks flamed with hectic spots,—sang the ballads of Dargomizhsky, in a voice tiny, but of an unusually pleasant timbre. Then, for a brief while, followed disputes about internal politics.

A thirty-year-old land-owner of Simbir served as the general laughing-stock and source of diversion,—he was as rosy and smooth-skinned as a Yorkshire suckling pig; his flaxen hair was clipped so short that it stood up like the quills of a hedge-hog; his mouth gaped; the distance from his nose to

his upper lip was enormous; his eye-lashes were white, and his mustaches were shockingly so. He exuded an atmosphere of the ingenuous silliness, freshness, naïveté and assiduity of the man who is close to the rich, black-loam land. He was just married, had put up his bonds, and had been appointed a justice of the peace. All these particulars, as well as the maiden name of his mother, and the names of all the people who had exerted their influence on his behalf, were known long since to everybody on the steamer, including in that number the captain and his two mates, and, it would seem, even the deck-hands. As a representative of the ruling power, and a member of a noble family of all the Russias, he overdid his patriotism and was constantly babbling nonsense. From Lower Novgorod to Saratov he had already contrived to shoot and hang, over and over again, all the sheenies, Finns, Pollacks, damned Armenians, Little Russians and other outlanders.

During the stops he would come out on deck in his cap with its velvet band and two insignia, and, shoving his hands in his

trouser-pockets, exposing his nobly-born, gray-cloth-clad posterior, he would watch, as one having authority, the sailors, the porters, the drivers of three-horse stages in their round hats trimmed with peacock feathers. His wife, a slender, elegant *demi vierge* from St. Petersburg, with an exceedingly pale face and exceedingly vivid, malevolent lips, did not oppose her husband in anything and was taciturn; at times she would smile—with a subtle, malignant smile—at the follies of her husband; for the greater part of the day she sat in the blaze of the sun with a yellow-backed French novel in her hands, her little thoroughbred feet in red morocco slippers crossed and stretched out along the bench. Somehow, one involuntarily sensed in her a *carrièriste*, a future governor's or some other high official's lady; most probably, this would be the future Messalina of the entire district. There was always an odor of *Crême Simon* about her, and of some modish perfume,—sweet, pungent, and tart, that made one want to sneeze. Their name was Kostretzov.

Among the permanent passengers there was

also a colonel of the artillery,—the most good-natured of men, a sloven and a glutton, with a grizzled stubble bristling on his cheeks and chin, and with his khaki-colored summer uniform jacket glistening over his abdomen from all possible sorts of soups and sauces. Every day, in the morning, he descended into the chef's domain, and would there choose a *stierlyadka* or a *sieuruzhka*,[1] which would be brought up to him on deck, still quivering in its wooden vessel, and, with his own hand, like an officiating high priest, breathing hard and smacking his lips, he would make marks with a knife upon the head of the fish, in circumvention of the cook's slyness,—lest he be served with another fish, a dead one.

Every evening, after the singing of the young lady from Moscow and after the political disputes, the colonel would play at a variation of whist far into the night. His constant partners were: an inspector of excise who was traveling to Askhabad,—a man of absolutely indeterminate years, all wrinkled, with atrocious teeth, who was insane on the

[1] Different species of the sturgeon.—*Trans.*

subject of amateur theatricals (in the intervals of the game, during deals, he would tell anecdotes of Hebrew life, with spirit and gayety, and not at all badly); the editor of some newspaper published near the Volga,—a bearded, beetle-browed man in golden spectacles; and a student by the name of Drzhevetzky.

The student played with constant good luck. He grasped the plays with rapidity, had a splendid memory for all the scores and hands, and regarded the mistakes of his partners with unvarying benignity. Despite the great heat, he was always clad in a greenish frock-coat with very long skirts and an exaggeratedly high collar, and with every button buttoned. His shoulder-blades were so greatly developed that he seemed round-shouldered, even with his great height. His hair was light and curly; his eyes were blue; his face was long and clean-shaven. He bore a slight resemblance, to judge by antique portraits, to the twenty-five-year-old generals of the War of 1812, in defense of the fatherland. However, there was something peculiar

about his appearance. At times, when he was off his guard, his eyes would assume such a tired, tortured expression, that one could freely, from his appearance, give his age even as fifty years. But the unobservant people on the steamer did not remark this, of course, just as his partners in play did not remark an unusual peculiarity of his hands: the student's thumbs were so long that they were almost even with the tips of his index fingers, while all his finger nails were short, broad, flat and strong. These hands testified with unusual conclusiveness to an obdurate will, to a cold egoism that was a stranger to all vacillations, and to his being capable of crime.

Somehow, from Nizhnii Novgorod to Sizran, during two evenings running, there were little games of chance. The games were "twenty-one," *chemin de fer,* and Polish banco. The student came out the winner to the tune of something like seventy *roubles.*[2] But he had managed to do it so charmingly,

[2] This story was written at a time when a *rouble* was worth about half an American dollar.—*Trans.*

and then had so obligingly proffered a loan of money to the petty lumber dealer he had won from, that everybody received an impression of his being a man of wealth, a man of good society and bringing-up.

II

IN Samara it took a very long time for the steamer to unload and load again. The student went for a swim, and, upon his return, took a seat in the captain's round-house,—a freedom permitted only to very likable passengers after having sailed together for a long time. With especial attention, he watched intently as three Jews boarded the steamer, apart from each other,—all three of them very well dressed, with rings on their hands and with sparkling pins in their cravats. He also managed to notice that the Jews pretended not to know one another, and also remarked a certain common trait in their appearance, which trait seemed to have been stamped upon them by the same profession, as well as certain almost imperceptible signals which they communicated to one another at a distance.

"Do you know who these men are?" he asked the captain's mate.

The captain's mate, a rather dark boy without a mustache, who, in the saloon, played the part of an old sea-wolf, was very kindly disposed toward the student. During his watches he would tell Drzhevetzky unseemly stories out of his past life and uttered abominable things about all the women who were then on the ship,—and the student would hear him out patiently and attentively, even though with a certain coolness.

"These?" the captain's mate repeated the student's question. "Commission merchants, beyond a doubt. Probably trading in flour or grain. Well, we shall find out right away. Listen, mister,—what's your name,—listen!" he called out, leaning over the railings. "Are you with a freight? With grain?"

"All through!" answered the Jew, lifting up his clever, observant face. "Now I am travelling for my own pleasure."

In the evening the young lady from Moscow again sang,—*Who Wedded Us;* the justice of the peace shouted about the good to be derived from exterminating all the sheenies and inaugurating corporal punishment

throughout all the Russias; the colonel was ordering *Sevriuzhka à l'Américaine,* with capers. The two commission merchants sat down to a game of "sixty-six,"—with old cards; then, as though by chance, the third one sat down with them, and the game changed to "preference." At the final settlement one of the players was short of change,—he could find only bank-notes of large denominations.

He said:

"Well, gentlemen, how are we going to settle? Do you want to play at *rouge et noir?*"

"Oh, no, thanks—I don't play at any games of chance," answered one of the others. "But then, it's a mere trifle. You can keep the change."

The first man appeared to take offense, but at this juncture the third one intervened:

"Gentlemen,—we aren't any steamboat sharpers, I think, and are in good company. Pardon me,—how much did you win?"

"My, but you are a hot-tempered fellow," said the first. "Six *roubles* and twenty *kopecks.*"

"Very well, then . . . I'll play you for the whole thing."

"Oi, don't scare me!" said the first, and began to deal.

He lost, and in his vexation doubled his stakes. And so, within a few minutes, a lively game of the hazardous Polish *banco* was on,—in which game the banker deals three cards to each partner, and turns up one card for each partner for himself.

Not even half an hour had passed before the table was covered with heaps of bank-notes, little stacks of gold and piles of silver. The banker was losing all the time, and, with all this, his portrayal of amazement and indignation was done with exceeding verisimilitude.

"Do you always have such a run of luck on steamers?" he would ask a partner with a venomous smile.

"Yes,—and on Thursdays especially," the other would answer with *sang froid.*

The unlucky player demanded that the cards be cut anew. But once more he began to lose. First and second class passengers

had crowded around their table. The play had, little by little, inflamed them all. The first to come in with them was the good-natured colonel of artillery; he was followed by the clerk of the excise, who was going to Akhsbad, and by the bearded editor. Madame Kostretzova's eyes became enkindled,—a proof of her high-strung nervous temperament.

"Do put your stakes against him," she said in an angry whisper to her husband. "Can't you see that bad luck is pursuing him?"

"*Mais, ma chérie.* . . . Only God knows who these people are," the justice of the peace protested feebly.

"Idiot!" said she, in a vehement whisper. "Bring my pocket-book from the cabin."

III

THE student had long since fathomed just what the matter was. It was perfectly clear to him that these three men formed the usual party of steamer card-sharpers. But, evidently, it was necessary for him to ponder over certain things and to comprehend them. He took a long black cigar at the counter, and settled down on the balcony, watching the steamer's shadow gliding over the yellow water, refracting the fantastic little spots of sunlight. The captain's mate upon seeing him ran down from the bridge, laughing significantly.

"Do you want me to show you one of the most interesting people in Russia, professor?"

"Really?" said the student indifferently, flicking the ashes off his cigar with a finger-nail.

"Look at that gentleman over there,—the one with the gray mustaches and a green silk shade over his eyes. That's Balunsky,—the King of the Card-Sharpers."

The student grew animated and threw a quick glance to his right.

"That fellow? Really? Is that truly Balunsky himself?"

"Yes. The very same."

"Well, is he playing now?"

"No. He's done for, entirely. And even if he were to sit down to play,—why then, as you know yourself, it would be our bounden duty to warn the public. . . . All he does is to hang about the tables, just watching and nothing more."

At this moment Balunsky was passing by them, and the student's eyes followed him with the liveliest interest. Balunsky was a tall, splendidly formed old man, with fine, proud features. The student saw much in his appearance: a habit from of old of bearing himself unconstrainedly with self-assurance before the eyes of a great gathering; soft, well-cared-for hands; an assumed, extrinsic air of *seigneur*. But the student also noticed a slight defect in the use of his right leg, and the time-whitened seams of his one-time splendid Parisian overcoat. And the

student, with an unfailing attentiveness and some peculiar feeling compounded of indifferent pity and a contempt devoid of any malice, observed all these trifles.

"There was a chap for you,—but he's all done for now," said the captain's mate.

"There's rather a big game going on downstairs," said the student calmly.

Then, suddenly, turning toward the captain's mate and staring stonily into his very pupils, he said as simply as if he were ordering his breakfast or dinner:

"To tell you the truth, *mon cher ami*, I have been keeping my eye on you for two whole days now, and I see that you aren't at all a stupid fellow, and, of course, are above any prejudices, such as are common to old women. For we are supermen, you and I,—isn't that so?"

"Well, generally speaking. . . . And according to the general theory of Nietzsche . . . " the captain's mate mumbled sententiously. "The life of man . . ."

"Yes, yes . . . Particulars by mail."

The student unbuttoned his frock-coat, and

took a dandified wallet of red leather with a gold monogram out of his side-pocket, and extracted two bills of a hundred *roubles* each out of the wallet.

"Catch hold, admiral! They are yours," said he, impressively.

"What for?" asked the captain's mate, blinking his eyes in surprise.

"For your so-resplendent beauty," said the student gravely. "And for the pleasure of conversing with a clever man who is unhampered by any prejudices."

"What am I supposed to do?"

This time the student spoke curtly and significantly, just like a general before an encounter:

"First of all, not to warn anybody about Balunsky. I need him as a control and a sort of a left hand. Is that a go?"

"It's a go!" answered the captain's mate gayly.

"Secondly: show me which one of the waiters can bring my own pack of cards to the table."

The sailor became somewhat hesitant.

"Procophii, perhaps?" he said, as though deliberating with himself.

"Ah, that's the thin, yellow chap, with drooping mustaches? Isn't it?"

"Yes, that's the fellow."

"Very well, then . . . He has a suitable face. I'll have a little private talk with him by myself, and a separate reckoning. After that, my youthful but ardent friend, I offer you the following proposition: I offer you two-and-a-half percent. of the gross receipts."

"Of the gross receipts?" the captain's mate began to snicker in delight.

"Yes, sir! That ought to make, approximately,—let me see . . . The colonel, I think, has a thousand *roubles* or so of his own, and, perhaps, some official money,—two thousand, let us say, in round figures. I estimate the justice of the peace at a thousand also. If we succeed in making his wife loosen up, I consider all this money as good as in my pocket already. All the others don't amount to much. And then I reckon all those snot-noses have about six or seven thousand among them. . . ."

"Whom do you mean?"

"Why, these petty steamboat sharpers. These same young men that, as you say, trade in grain and flour."

"But really . . . but really . . ." The captain's mate suddenly saw the light.

"Oh, yes, really! I'll show them how the game ought to be played. They ought to be working a three card monte game around some corner at fairs. Captain, you have three hundred more guaranteed you, beside these two hundred. But there must be an agreement: you must not pull any awful faces at me, even if I lose my shirt; you must not interfere where you are not asked; nor back me up to win; and—most important of all—no matter what happens to me, even the very worst, you must not reveal your acquaintance with me. Remember, you are neither a master nor a pupil,—but just a capper."

"A capper!" snickered the captain's mate.

"What a fool!" said the student calmly.

And, throwing the stub of his cigar overboard, he got up quickly to intercept Balunsky, who was passing by, and familiarly put

his arm through that of the other. They conversed for not more than two minutes, and, when they had finished, Balunsky doffed his hat with an air of obsequity and mistrust.

IV

LATE at night the student and Balunsky were sitting upon the ship's bridge. The moonlight played and spattered on the water. The left shore, high, steep, all grown over with shaggy woods, taciturnly hung over the very steamer, that was now passing altogether near it. The shore to the right lay like a distant, flat splotch. Frankly slumping, hunched up even more than usual, the student was negligently sitting on a bench, his long legs stretched out before him. His face betrayed fatigue, and his eyes were dull.

"About how old are you?" asked Balunsky, gazing at the river.

The student let the question pass in silence.

"You must pardon my impertinence," Balunsky persisted, after a little fidgeting. "I understand very well your reason for placing me near you. I also understand why you told that four-flusher that you would slap his

face if, after inspection, the pack of cards would prove to be right. You uttered this superbly. I admired you. But, for God's sake, do tell me how you did it?"

The student finally forced himself to speak, as though with revulsion:

"You see, the trick lies in that I do not resort to any contra-legal expedients. I base my play upon the human soul. Have no fear, —I know all the old devices you used to practice. Stacking, holding out, devices for concealment, cold decks,—am I right?"

"No," remarked Balunsky, offended. "We had stunts even more complicated. I, for instance, was the first to bring satin cards into use."

"Satin cards?" the student repeated.

"Why, yes. Satin is pasted over the card. By rubbing against cloth the pile of the satin is bent to one side, and a jack is drawn thereon. Then, when the colors have dried, the pile is reversed, and a queen drawn. If your queen is beaten, all you have to do is to draw the card over the table."

"Yes, I've heard of that," said the stu-

dent. "It did give one an extra chance. But then, stuss is such a fool game!"

"I do agree with you that it has gone out of fashion. But that was a time of the splendid efflorescence of the art. How much wit, how much resourcefulness we had to exert. . . . Poluboyarinov [1] used to clip the skin at the tips of his fingers; his tactile sense was more exquisite than that of a blind man. He would recognize a card by the mere touch. And what about cold decks? Why, this took whole years to master."

The student yawned.

"That was all a primitive game."

"Yes, yes! That is just why I am questioning you. Wherein does your secret lie? I must tell you that I was in on large killings. During a single month I made more than six hundred thousand in Odessa and St. Petersburg. And, besides that, I won a four-story house and a bustling hotel."

The student waited for him, on the chance of his adding something; then, a little later, he asked:

[1] "Half-a-lord."—*Trans.*

"Aha! You set up a mistress, a fine turn-out, a lad in white gloves to wait at table,—yes?"

"Yes!" answered Balunsky, sadly and humbly.

"There, now, you see,—I guessed all that beforehand. There really was something romantic about your generation. And that is readily understood. Horse-fairs, hussars, gypsy-women, champagne. . . . Were you ever beaten up?"

"Yes,—after the Liebiyadinskaya fair I was laid up in Tambov for a whole month. You can just imagine; I even grew bald—all my hair fell out. Nothing like that had ever happened to me up to that time,—not as long as I had Duke Kudukov about me. He worked with me on a ten percent. basis. I must say that I had never in my life met a man of greater physical strength. His title and his strength screened us both. Besides that, he was a man of unusual courage. He'd be sitting and getting stewed on Teneriffe at the bar, and when he'd hear a hubbub in the card room he would rush to my rescue. Oh,

what a racket he and I raised once in Penza! Candlesticks, mirrors, lustres . . ."

"Did drink do for him?" asked the student, as though in passing.

"How did you know that?" asked Balunsky, in amazement.

"Why, just so. . . .The actions of men are uniform in the extreme. Really, living becomes a bore at times."

After a long silence, Balunsky asked:

"But why do you gamble yourself?"

"Really, that is something I do not know myself," said the student with a melancholy sigh. "For instance, I have vowed to myself, on my word of honor, to abstain from gambling for exactly three years. And for two years I did abstain; but to-day, for some reason or other, I got my dander up. And, I assure you, gambling is repulsive to me. Nor am I in need of money."

"Have you any saved?"

"Yes,—a few thousand. Formerly, I thought that it might be of use to me at some time or other. But time has sped somehow incongruously fast. I often ask myself,—

what is it that I desire? I am surfeited with women. Pure love, marriage, a family, are not for me,—or, to put it more correctly, I do not believe in them. I eat with exceeding moderation, and I do not drink a drop. Am I to save up for an old age? But what am I to do in my old age? Others have a consolation,—religion. I often think: well, now, suppose I were made a king or an emperor this very day. . . . What would I desire? Upon my word of honor, I don't know. There's nothing for me to desire, even."

The water gurgled monotonously as the steamer clove through it. . . . Radiantly, sadly and evenly the moon poured down its light upon the white sides of the steamer, upon the river, upon the distant shores. The steamer was going through a narrow, shallow splace . . . "Six . . . Si-ix an' a ha-alf! . . . Go slow!" a man with a plummet was bawling nasally at the prow.

"But what is your system of playing?" asked Balunsky timidly.

"Why, I have no particular system," answered the student lazily. "I do not play at

cards, but upon human stupidity. I am not at all a sharper. I never prick or mark a pack. I only acquaint myself with the design on the back of the cards, and for that reason always play with second-hand cards. But it's all the same to me,—after two or three deals I am bound to know every card, because my visual memory is phenomenal. Yet I do not want to expend the energy of my brain vainly. I am firmly convinced that if a man will set his heart on being fooled, fooled he will be, beyond a doubt. And therefore I knew beforehand the fate of to-day's game."

"In what way?"

"Very simply. For instance: the justice of the peace is a vainglorious and a silly fool,—if you will pardon the pleonasm. His wife does whatever she wants to with him. But she is a woman of passion; impatient, and, apparently, hysterical. I had to draw the two of them into the game. He committed many blunders; but she committed twice as many, just to spite him. In this way they let pass that one moment when they were having a run of pure luck. They failed to take ad-

vantage of it. They started winning back only when luck had turned its back upon them; whereas ten minutes before that they could have left me without my breeches."

"Is it really possible to calculate all this?" asked Balunsky quietly.

"Of course. Now for another instance. Take the colonel. This man has far-flung, inexhaustible luck, which he himself does not suspect. And that is because he is an expansive, careless, magnanimous fellow. By God, I was a bit ashamed of plucking him. But it was already impossible to stop. The fact was, that those three little sheenies were irritating me."

" 'Could not endure,—the heart burst into flame'?" asked the old sharper, quoting the stanza from Lermontov.

The student gnashed his teeth, and his face became somewhat animated.

"You're perfectly right," said he, contemptuously. "That's just it,—I couldn't endure it. Judge for yourself: they got on the steamer to shear the rams, yet they have no daring, nor skill, nor *sang froid*. When one of them

was passing the deck to me, I at once noticed that his hands were clammy and trembling. 'Eh, my dear fellow, your heart is in your mouth!' As for their game, it was perfectly clear to me. The partner to the left—the one on whose cheek was a little mole, all grown over with hair—was stacking the cards. That was as plain as day. It was necessary to make them sit apart, and for that very reason—" here the student resorted to patter, "I had recourse, *cher maître*, to your enlightened co-operation. And I must say that you carried out my idea with full correctness. Allow me to present you with your share."

"Oh, but why so much?"

"A mere nothing. You shall do still another good turn for me."

"I am listening."

"Do you remember perfectly the face of the justice's wife?"

"Yes."

"Then you will go to her and say: 'Your money was won purely through chance.' You may even tell her that I am a sharper. Yes, —but that it is in such a lofty, Byronian man-

ner, you know. She will bite. She will get her money in Saratov, at the Hotel Moscow, to-night, at six, from Drzhevetzky, the student. Room number one."

"So I am to be a go-between,—is that it?" asked Balunsky.

"Why put it so unpleasantly? Isn't 'One good turn deserves another' better?"

Balunsky got up, stood shifting on the same spot from one foot to the other, and took off his hat. Finally he said, hesitatingly:

"I'll do it. After all, it's a trifle. But,—perhaps you will need me as an operative?"

"No," answered the student. "To act collectively is the old style. I work alone."

"Alone? Always alone?"

"Of course. Whom could I trust?" retorted the student with a calm bitterness. "If I am sure of your comradely rectitude,—an honor among thieves, you understand,—I am not at all sure of the steadiness of your nerves. Another may be brave, and without covetousness, and be a faithful friend, but . . . only until the first silken petticoat happens to make a swine, a dog, and a traitor of

him. And what of blackmailings? What of extortions? What of importunities in old age, in incapacitation? . . . Eh, what's the use!"

"I am amazed at you," said Balunsky quietly. "You are the new generation. You have neither timidity, nor pity, nor imagination. . . . You have a certain contempt for everything. Is it possible that all your secret consists of just that and nothing more?"

"Just that. But in a great concentration of the will as well. You may believe me or not,—it is all one to me—but ten times to-day, by an effort of my will, have I compelled the colonel to stake small sums, when it was to his interests to have staked large ones. It doesn't come easy to me. . . . I have a monstrous headache right now. And besides . . . besides, I don't know, I can't imagine, what it means to get a beating or to go to pieces from confusion. Organically, I am devoid of shame or fear, and that isn't at all as joyous a thing as it may seem at first glance. True, I constantly carry a revolver about me,—but then, you must believe me when I tell you that at a critical moment I shall not forget about

it. However . . ." the student simulated a yawn and extended his hand to Balunsky with a weary gesture. "However, *au revoir*, general. I can see your eyes closing. . . ."

"My best wishes," said the old sharper respectfully, bowing his gray head.

Balunsky went off to bed. The student, hunched up, with weary, sad eyes for a long while regarded the waves that reflected the light like fish-scales. Late at night Kostretzova came out on deck. But he did not as much as turn in her direction.

THE OLD CITY OF MARSEILLES

I

AT the time that the new city, together with its splendid street of Cannobierre, is, about eleven o'clock at night, plunging into deep, *bourgeois* slumber, —at that time the old city comes to life.

The old city is a capricious, odd network of crooked, narrow little streets, through which it would be impossible even for a one horse cab to drive. What inconceivable stench, filth and darkness reign in this involved cloaka! All sorts of domestic refuse, swill, greens, oyster-shells,—everything is dumped on the street, or simply thrown out of the window. And it is not at all a rare sight to see in the street some swarthy lad or girl of six or seven paying the debt to nature in one of those poses that Teniers, Van Braouveur, and Teniers the Younger (Teneers) used to depict with such naïve art on their can-

vases. There are in the old city such by-lanes, narrow, dark even in the daytime, that one has to run through them, stopping one's nose with the fingers and holding the breath.

And so, when night comes on, the old city comes to life. Nearer the central streets it is still somewhat respectable; but, as the port draws nearer, as the streets sink down,—the old city becomes gayer and more unrestrained. To the right and left there is nothing but little taverns, gayly illuminated from within. There are sounds of music from everywhere. Sailors and cabin-boys, in fives and sixes, walk along the streets, holding one another around waists and necks,—French, Italian, Greek, English, Russian. . . . The bars are crowded to overflowing. . . . Tobacco smoke; absinthe; and cursing in all the tongues of the terrestrial globe. . . .

Of course, both Baedekers and people in the know will warn you that it is dangerous to go into the port even in the daytime. For that reason, quite naturally, we set out for it at night; and once more, for the hundreth time, I reiterate that all Baedekers lie;

and that the most charming, peaceful and simple of folks are sailors, a trifle under the weather. We enter a low-ceiled, stuffy tavern and modestly ask for some lemonade and ice, —the nights are sultry now, and we are afflicted by thirst, and there is no better remedy in the world for quenching it. Immediately two crudely daubed young damsels sit down near me and my comrade, and, under the table, each lays her leg upon that of her neighbor. This is a special coquetry of the sea. They demand various drinks from us. We willingly submit,—for, surely, the *bon ton* of the place must be sustained. A quarter of an hour elapses. Our ladies perceive that we do not at all belong to that tribe of people who are buffeted for two or three months at a time in the midst of the stormy sea, without seeing a single woman during all that time. They beg for pin-money. Five *francs* not only pacify them, but even enrapture them, and they trustingly tell us of certain secret phases of their life. From boatswains and captains, especially those who are rather elderly, they take two or three *francs;* from

sailors, a *franc*,—and sometimes even fifty *centimes*. Right above, over the bar, there are several labyrinthine corridors, with stall-like rooms to the right and left. A momentary love or its simulacrum,—and man and woman have gone their different directions. Is it much a sailor wants?

"But there's one bad thing about it, monsieur," says the lanky Henrietta gravely, "sometimes they drink too much whisky-and-soda, and then they start in to fight. That's very unpleasant, dangerous, and troublesome for us. And it's nothing else but whisky-and-soda that knocks them off their feet or drives them crazy. However, absinthe will also turn the trick."

II

THAT day, no matter how we tried, we were not able to find the way back to our hotel, The Port. We were as confused as blind puppies near the grandiose, silent Veauban fortifications; and for ten times or so, after having gone around in a circle, we returned to the same spot. Finally we chanced to meet a knot of intoxicated sailors. We politely asked them for directions, and immediately all of them,—some ten or fifteen,—painstakingly and obligingly escorted us to our very house.

I also recall another night. We were sitting in a Spanish bar, situated on one of the innumerable streets of the port,—among which streets, by the way, I could never orientate myself. A party of Englishmen had planted themselves solidly alongside of us,—probably they belonged to the aristocracy of ships: skippers, machinists, or boatswains,—or some-

thing of that sort. They were all well-grown, austere, stalwart men, with sun-burnt, weather-beaten, rough-skinned faces. One of them, a clean-shaven chap, with a head as bare as a billiard ball, lit a pipe. I recognized my favorite Maryland tobacco by the smell, and, lifting my hat slightly and turning toward the billiard ball, I asked:

"*Old Judge*, sir?" [1]

"Oh, yes, sir," [1] and, good-naturedly, having dried the mouthpiece by means of pressing his elbow hard against his side, he extended the pipe to me:

"Please, sir." [1]

Fortunately, I still had some Russian cigarettes (and they can be truly appreciated only in France, where everybody smokes the most execrable tobacco of the government monopoly), and I offered him my case. Five minutes later we were already squeezing one another's hands, so that my bones cracked, and we were yelling all over the old city:

"Rule, Britannia, Britannia rules the waves!"

[1] In English in the original.—*Trans.*

There was still another incident which, to this day, I recall with deep, joyous tenderness.

This happened when the night was on the wane,—about three or four o'clock, say. It was the peak of things, so to speak, in the little tavern. The waiters could barely manage to place on the little tables the most diversified "swell" drinks of all imaginable colors: glaucous, brown, light blue, and others. Barely visible through the dense tobacco smoke were the dark contours of the people, that walked just as though they were figures in a nightmare, that, just like drowned men under water, moved, swayed, and embraced one another.

And at this juncture an exceedingly queer fellow walked in through the wide-open doors. He was already old, about fifty or sixty, small of stature, and spare. His thick gray hair falls over his shoulders and back like a superb, beautiful mane. He has a lofty, broad brow, strong and splendid in structure; heavy, overhanging eye-lids; puckered eyes; and dark pouches under the eyes. The color of

the face is dark, earthy, unhealthy. He has a multitude of wrinkles, ashen gray mustaches and beard. In his hands he carries an odd musical instrument. It consists of an ordinary cigar box, upon which are still preserved the black, oval trade-marks, *Colorado*. A round opening has been sawn in the lid. A small, narrow board, crudely glued on to the box, serves as its neck. There are home-made keys and six fine strings.

This man does not exchange greetings with any one, and does not even seem to see anybody. He calmly squats down near the counter; then he lies down along its length, upon the bare floor, face upward. For a few seconds he tunes his amazing instrument, then loudly calls out, in the jargon of the south, the name of some popular national song, and, still lying down, commences to play.

I am very fond of the guitar,—that tender, chanting, expressive instrument,—and I have frequent occasion to hear artists who have the mastery of virtuosos on this instrument,—up to celebrities, known to all Russia. But still, up to this incident, I could never imagine that

a piece of wood with strings and ten human digits could create such full and harmonious singing music. The cigar box of this curious old man sang with silvern sounds, just like a distant, splendid choir, composed of children, women, or angels.

The noisy bar immediately became quiet. Pipes and cigars were put away somewhere or other. The sailors forgot about their beer-mugs, and it seemed to me that this somber drinking place somehow grew brighter and cleaner. The women first, and then all the other visitors after them, got up from their places and surrounded the recumbent old man. From a neighboring dive came the sounds of a concertina harmonica. Some one tip-toed up to the door and closed it without a sound.

The old man concluded one song, and at once called out the name of another, and again commenced playing, directing his puckered eyes toward the ceiling. Thus, amidst the general, reverential silence,—yes, now it will be appropriate to use the word,—he played several popular songs through, now

slow and passionate, then playfully and slyly provoking, in which one could involuntarily sense an ancient Arabian intricacy, sensuously passionate, indolently languishing. Having played the basal *motif*, he would begin to vary it, and I will scarcely be mistaken in saying that these variations entered his head but now, even as he lay on the spittle-covered floor and improvised.

Finally he said, in the purest of French:

"Now I shall play for you a waltz by Chopin. *Valse Brillante,*" he added, in explanation.

Who does not know this waltz, always difficult in technique, as it is executed on the *forte piano?* And I, with joy and amazement, not only heard, but, so it seems to me, saw, how from the strings stretched over the cigar box there suddenly poured shimmering stones of great value,—playing, sparkling, kindling with deep vari-colored fires. A god was juggling diamonds.

Having finished, the old man took the instrument in his right hand, and stretched his left upward. At first his intention was not

comprehended, and, with a certain insistence he repeated his gesture. K., my fellow-traveler, was the first to surmise what the matter was, and took the old man by the hand, helping him to get up. At once scores of hands caught up the old man respectfully and cautiously, and put him on his feet. For a few moments the crowd hid him completely from my view, and it was then that I made a *faux pas*, at the recollection of which I blush even now, as I dictate these lines. I had not noticed that many of the auditors were extending money to the old man, and that he was courteously and firmly declining these proffers. With a heart moved to tenderness, with a *gaucherie* common to all people under such circumstances, I squeezed my way through to the old man and extended to him a handful of silver. But probably my humble gift, made with all the sincerity of my soul, was just the very drop that makes the goblet overflow. The old man looked at me, puckering his eyes contemptuously,—he had splendid, dark, profound eyes,—and said dryly, clipping off each word distinctly:

"I did not play for you, nor for them," and he made a sweeping gesture that took in all the spectators. "But, had you in reality listened to me attentively, and if you do understand anything at all of music,—you must be aware that this is such a rare occasion that it is not you that have to thank me, but I that have to thank you," and, having plunged his hand into a pocket of the widest of trowsers, he drew thence a whole heap of copper coins, and majestically gave them to me.

Completely at a loss, confused, I began to mumble incoherent apologies:

"I am dreadfully ashamed, *maître*, over my action . . . I am in despair. . . . You will confer a great honor upon me and will quiet my conscience if you will consent to sit down at our table and will take a swallow of some wine or other . . ."

The old man was a trifle mollified, and almost smiled, but never the less he declined the invitation.

"I neither drink nor smoke. And I wouldn't advise you to. Landlord! I'll have a glass of cold water, please."

Probably never during his entire checquered life had the landlord—stocky giant, all grown over with hair, with a bared neck like a bull's—poured out wine for anybody with that profound and attentive respect with which he filled a glass of water for the musician. The old man drank off the water, carelessly thanked the landlord, made a farewell sign with his hand to all of us, and walked out into the darkness of the night. Subsequently, I made a round of all the taverns, bars, and dram-shops of the old city, in the hope of running across a trace of my mysterious musician. But he had concealed himself somewhere, had vanished, just like water that hath flowed away, just like a cloud that has raced by and melted away, just like a magic dream. But one thing consoles me, whenever my recollections turn upon this astonishing man: never an American millionaire; never an Englishman, in the special costume of a tourist, with a pith helmet on his head, with a Baedeker under his armpit, a Kodak in one hand, an alpenstock in the other, and binoculars slung over his shoulder; never a

prince of the blood, traveling incognito,—never shall any one of them see and never shall any one of them hear anything of the sort. And this thought, willy nilly, gladdens me.